

# Break Free from Anxiety

Being worried or nervous occasionally is to be expected. You might have an upcoming test, presentation, or appointment with your health care provider. Having some anxiety from time to time is just a natural part of being human.

However, when these experiences of anxiety become more persistent and get in the way of your daily activities and overall enjoyment of life, they need to be addressed. The good news is that there are many effective treatments for anxiety.

## Types of anxiety disorders

If you are experiencing an anxiety disorder, know that you are not alone. The National Institutes of Health estimates that about 18 percent of people living in the United States have experienced an anxiety disorder in any given year.

Some examples of common anxiety disorders include:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder**  
People who experience generalized anxiety disorder have strong feelings of nervousness, worry, or fear that do not easily go away. The anxious feelings seem to be beyond their control, which can make it difficult to focus on everyday tasks.
- **Social anxiety disorder**  
Those who face social anxiety disorder frequently have overwhelming feelings of self-consciousness, embarrassment, nervousness, and fear in social situations.
- **Panic disorder**  
Panic disorder is characterized by sudden and unexpected feelings of intense fear and panic. These feelings are accompanied by bodily sensations associated with the nervous system's "fight or flight" response, including symptoms like increased heart rate, sweating, shortness of breath, or trembling.

## Getting support

Connecting with a counselor through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a good starting point. These specialists can help you with an assessment of your situation; provide you with short-term counseling; and refer you to community resources.

## Anxiety awareness

Understanding anxiety and recognizing the signs in yourself can be invaluable — and a helpful first step to managing it. Some things to look for include:

- Frequently feeling nervous or "on edge"
- Difficulty concentrating
- Strong and frequent fearful thoughts
- Unexplainable feelings of dread

Some of the symptoms of anxiety may also be warning signs of other concerns, including medical conditions. Phone 911 or call your health care provider if you are experiencing:

- Tightness in your chest
- Nausea or feeling sick to your stomach
- A racing heart
- Intense feelings of panic

### **Tips for reducing triggers of anxiety**

While more serious anxiety may be helped by medication, sometimes you can head milder occurrences of anxiety off at the pass by trying:

- **Deep breathing**  
Breathing deeply triggers the nervous system to begin the “rest and digest” response to counter the “fight or flight” response. Begin by counting how long it takes you to naturally exhale. If you notice it takes a count of four, try to extend your next exhale to a count of five— letting the inhale happen naturally. Then, as time progresses, see if you can increase the count a little more — to a count of six, for example.
- **Relaxing**  
Deep relaxation also activates the “rest and digest” response. One deep relaxation method is to progressively relax the body. Start at your toes and relax the muscles in the toes and progress up the body — remember to relax the muscles in the face, too.
- **Taking care of yourself**  
Be aware that sometimes when you are having unexplainable feelings of fear or nervousness, it may be that your body is stressed. You may be dehydrated from not taking in enough water and other fluids. Or, your body could be stressed because you have not been getting enough quality sleep. So, make sure to get regular physical activity, proper nutrition, and good sleep.
- **Affirming**  
Affirmations can help calm you by changing your thinking about a situation, while reinforcing more positive thought patterns. For example, if you start to feel nervous, you can affirm: “I am safe and calm now.” or “Every day I become more relaxed and composed.” Every time you find yourself feeling the symptoms, come back to the affirmation — it takes practice to build a different thought pattern.
- **Anticipating anxiety**  
Some things can just naturally cause anxiety, such as concern over a delayed flight, someone who is unreasonably late for an appointment, etc. Being able to recognize what may trigger anxiety for you personally can give you the opportunity to take action to manage the anxious feelings. Begin your deep breathing exercises or affirmations the minute you anticipate anxiety approaching — and, when possible, remove yourself from crowds or other things that might aggravate the situation.

For some people, however, their anxiety may not be sufficiently impacted by deep breathing or relaxation techniques. In those instances, reach out to a health care provider or to the EAP for support.

Employee Assistance Program  
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