



Dealing with ANXIETY

Nervousness can turn into a problem that affects your mind, body, and life.

We all experience anxiety. For example, speaking in front of a group can make us anxious, but that anxiety also motivates us to prepare and practice. Driving in heavy traffic is another common source of anxiety, but it helps keep us alert and cautious to avoid accidents. However, when feelings of intense fear and distress become overwhelming and prevent us from doing everyday activities, an anxiety disorder may be the cause.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States. Over 40 million adults in the U.S. have an anxiety disorder. Meanwhile, approximately 7% of children aged 3-17 experience issues with anxiety each year. Most people develop symptoms before age 21.

Diagnosis

Physical symptoms of an anxiety disorder can be easily confused with other medical conditions, like heart disease or hyperthyroidism. Therefore, a doctor will likely perform an evaluation involving a physical examination, an interview and lab tests. After ruling out an underlying physical illness, a doctor may refer a person to a mental health professional for evaluation.

Using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) a mental health professional is able to identify the specific type of anxiety disorder causing symptoms as well as any other possible disorders that may be involved. Tackling all disorders through comprehensive treatment is the best recovery strategy.

Coping Strategies

Try these when you're feeling anxious or stressed:

- **Take a time-out.** Practice yoga, listen to music, meditate, get a massage, or learn relaxation techniques. Stepping back from the problem helps clear your head.
- **Eat well-balanced meals.** Do not skip any meals. Do keep healthful, energy-boosting snacks on hand.
- **Limit alcohol and caffeine,** which can aggravate anxiety and trigger panic attacks.
- **Get enough sleep.** When stressed, your body needs additional sleep and rest.
- **Exercise daily** to help you feel good and maintain your health. Check out the fitness tips below.
- **Take deep breaths.** Inhale and exhale slowly.
- **Count to 10 slowly.** Repeat, and count to 20 if necessary.

- **Do your best.** Instead of aiming for perfection, which isn't possible, be proud of however close you get.
- **Accept that you cannot control everything.** Put your stress in perspective: Is it really as bad as you think?
- **Welcome humor.** A good laugh goes a long way.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.** Make an effort to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
- **Get involved.** Volunteer or find another way to be active in your community, which creates a support network and gives you a break from everyday stress.
- **Learn what triggers your anxiety.** Is it work, family, school, or something else you can identify? Write in a journal when you're feeling stressed or anxious, and look for a pattern.
- **Talk to someone.** Tell friends and family you're feeling overwhelmed, and let them know how they can help you. Talk to a physician or therapist for professional help.

Fitness Tips: Stay Healthy, Manage Stress

For the biggest benefits of exercise, try to include at least 2½ hours of moderate-intensity physical activity (e.g. brisk walking) each week, 1¼ hours of a vigorous-intensity activity (such as jogging or swimming laps), or a combination of the two.

- **5 X 30:** Jog, walk, bike, or dance three to five times a week for 30 minutes.
- **Set small daily goals** and aim for daily consistency rather than perfect workouts. It's better to walk every day for 15-20 minutes than to wait until



the weekend for a three-hour fitness marathon. Lots of scientific data suggests that frequency is most important.

- **Find forms of exercise** that are fun or enjoyable. Extroverted people often like classes and group activities. People who are more introverted often prefer solo pursuits.
- **Distract yourself** with an iPod or other portable media player to download audiobooks, podcasts, or music. Many people find it's more fun to exercise while listening to something they enjoy.
- **Recruit** an "exercise buddy." It's often easier to stick to your exercise routine when you have to stay committed to a friend, partner, or colleague.
- **Be patient** when you start a new exercise program. Most sedentary people require about four to eight weeks to feel coordinated and sufficiently in shape so that exercise feels easier.

For More Information

For more information on conditions that affect mental health, resources, and research, visit www.mentalhealth.gov, or the NIMH website at www.nimh.nih.gov.



Mental Health Center
of North Central Alabama

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