

Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of uneasiness, apprehension, or tension you may feel in response to stressful or threatening circumstances. Some people feel more anxiety than others.

How does it occur?

Anxiety can be mild, or it may be so intense that you feel panic. Normally anxiety is temporary, but when it lasts a long time or occurs without some kind of stress or threat, it is considered an illness.

When anxiety is so extreme that you are in a panic and cannot function normally, it is a psychiatric disorder known as a panic disorder.

Anxiety can be brought on by drugs such as:

- alcohol
- cocaine
- caffeine
- certain sedatives
- amphetamines
- other drugs that affect the nervous system.

Medical conditions can also cause anxiety. Heart problems, breathing problems, lack of vitamins, or blood sugar or thyroid problems can cause anxiety symptoms. For this reason, it is always important to discuss any long-term anxiety with your health care provider.

What are the symptoms?

The signs and symptoms of anxiety may be both psychological and physical.

Psychological symptoms include:

- apprehension or fear
- feeling cranky or irritable
- panic
- impatience
- feeling of imminent danger
- feeling restless or unable to relax
- trouble concentrating
- trouble sleeping
- lack of enjoyment.

Physical signs and symptoms include:

- dry mouth or feeling like you are choking
- flushing
- nausea or vomiting

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- feeling faint, lightheaded, or shaky
- diarrhea
- constipation
- muscle tension
- frequent urination
- hyperactivity
- sexual difficulties
- rapid or irregular heartbeat
- hyperventilating or feeling short of breath
- sweating, especially in the palms.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms. He or she will ask you about life events, daily activities, and your view of how things are going.

Your health care provider will also examine you. Lab tests may be done to rule out a physical problem as the reason for your anxiety. Possible tests include a blood tests, thyroid function tests, and urine tests.

How is it treated?

You and your health care provider will discuss your symptoms. Then he or she will suggest ways to help you deal with anxiety. Your provider may refer you to a specialist such as a psychiatrist or psychotherapist. Relaxation therapy, imaging, biofeedback, stress management techniques, and other forms of therapy may be useful.

If your anxiety is severe or causing panic, your health care provider may prescribe a medicine to help you cope with the symptoms.

To decrease anxiety, it is important to identify and use methods that relieve your symptoms. Your health care provider may want to see you regularly if your anxiety attacks include physical symptoms.

How can I take care of myself?

Increase your awareness of how anxiety and stress affect you and learn which coping methods work for you. Also, get enough rest, exercise, and learn to use relaxation techniques. Talk with your health care provider or therapist about managing events in your life that trigger anxiety. In addition, make an effort to talk with friends and coworkers about the normal stresses of daily life.

What can I do to help prevent anxiety?

Anxiety may occur when life's demands are greater than your ability to cope with them. Therefore, prevention means improving your coping skills or modifying the demands and expectations in your life. To prevent anxiety, try these suggestions:

- Exercise for 20 minutes, at least 3 times a week.
- Change your drinking, eating, and sleeping habits:
 - Sleep 6 to 8 hours per night.

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- Drink less coffee and alcohol.
- Find improved ways to cope with stress:
 - Change or eliminate what causes your stress.
 - Develop methods of relaxation like talking with positive-minded people, listening to music, sewing, playing cards, walking, or enjoying hobbies.
 - Set limits when too many demands are placed on you. Learn to say no.
 - Learn to use stress management techniques like muscle relaxation exercises, mental imagery, and diaphragmatic breathing.
 - Use positive thoughts to overcome negative ones, such as telling yourself, "I am doing a good job."
 - Develop and maintain an attitude that things will work out.
 - Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle.
 - Seek professional help for dealing with life events that produce stress, and for developing positive ways of coping.

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