

Managing a Health Condition and Your Anxiety About It



Facing a physical health condition can be hard enough on its own. But it can be even more difficult to cope when anxiety gets in the way.

This is especially true when your anxiety stems from your treatment. Remember, it's natural to feel this way. Many forms of treatment can be stressful. But there are things you can do to help take control of your anxiety—and help your health condition in the process.

Identifying the source of your anxiety

Start by figuring out what is making you feel anxious. For instance, if you have feelings of dread or panic surrounding appointments, think about what specifically triggers those emotions. You may find that your anxiety is about a certain thing. Some common sources of treatment-related anxiety include:

- Pain
- Needing frequent appointments
- Missing work
- Enclosed spaces (like small exam rooms or a medical test that requires confinement)
- Blood
- Germs
- Needles
- Surgery
- Medicines
- Cost
- Disruptions caused to family or friends

Figuring out your triggers will help you with your treatment. Once you know what causes your anxiety, you can work to address it.

Finding ways to cope

Regardless of your anxiety's source, there are steps you can take to address it. These include:

- **Talking to your healthcare provider about your anxiety.** If your trigger is a type of treatment, let them know. They'll do what they can to make the experience more comfortable for you. The odds are good that they've had patients with this fear before.
- **Building nontriggering treatment plans.** See if there are other options to the part of the treatment you feel anxious about. For instance, if a certain type of medicine is a trigger, see if there's something else you can take.
- **Talking with your employer and family and friends.** If your trigger is juggling work and family needs, ask about work accommodations that may help. Talk with family and friends about ways they can support you during your treatments. Your human resources department may have formal policies in place on this topic.

- **Talk to the facility's financial department.** If your anxiety is related to the cost of treatment, talking to the institution's financial advisors about costs and payment options may help decrease your stress.
- **Planning for exposure.** Sometimes you must face your anxiety to get the treatment you need. Identify when these exposures will happen. Use coping mechanisms to help get you through.
- **Journaling about your anxiety.** Use a paper journal or an app on your phone.
- **Practicing simple relaxation methods.** These include meditating and breathing exercises. Try focusing on a certain sense. For instance, wear a comforting sweater to an appointment and focus on the way it feels. Or play music before the stressful part of your treatment and focus on the rhythm.
- **Reducing the amount of caffeine you consume.** Studies have shown that caffeine can increase anxiety.
- **Bringing a loved one along with you.** Having the support of a loved one goes a long way. They can advocate for you and listen to treatment recommendations.
- **Researching treatment options for your anxiety.** Ask your healthcare provider for help if needed.

Treating your anxiety

Finding the right treatment for anxiety can be a difficult process. You may be reluctant to get treated when you already need to manage your physical health condition. But it's important. Treating your mental health will help you better take care of your physical health.

Before you make a decision, do some research. Talk with your healthcare provider. Some treatment options for anxiety include:

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy.** This approach will help you control your thoughts and emotions. Your therapist will help you pinpoint why you think, feel, and behave the way you do. After identifying these patterns, you can work toward creating new ones.
- **Exposure therapy.** This may sound scary. But it doesn't mean directly exposing you to your fear. Instead, this therapy helps you confront your fear slowly. For instance, if you're afraid of the hospital, you may start by looking at pictures of hospitals.
- **Hypnotherapy.** This form of therapy uses hypnosis. This treatment can sometimes help people identify sources of anxiety. It may also be useful in creating new thought patterns.
- **Medicines.** Prescribed antidepressants may provide relief.

Once you've researched these options, talk with your healthcare provider about them. Your provider can direct you to resources, too. They may also be able to tell you which treatment option might work best with your physical condition.

Don't feel ashamed about getting help for your anxiety. A healthy mind and a healthy body go hand in hand. So learning how to cope with your anxiety will help you treat your physical health condition, too.

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