



Understanding, finding support and supporting others.

Student Wellness Centre

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What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal response to stress experienced by everyone. In its milder form, anxiety can energize and motivate you. In its more extreme form, anxiety prepares you for action.

Anxiety is Normal

Anxiety is a normal part of the human experience. It is something each of us will

16% of USask students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety within the last month. **36%** said that anxiety has negatively affected their academics.

NCHA USask 2019

experience to some degree nearly every day. More than 1 out of 20 Canadians are affected by an anxiety disorder. 61% of university students report having felt

overwhelming anxiety in the last 12 months). If you are struggling with feelings of anxiety, you are normal.

Anxiety is Natural

Before we had buildings and technologies to protect us, anxiety was a key factor in our survival. It has a role to play in our lives today as well. It can motivate us to be productive, help us to perform better by ensuring

Feeling of anxiety can range from uneasiness to extreme panic and fears. **The good news is that anxiety, at any level, can be treated.**

good preparation, and help us make fast decisions if we find ourselves in danger. It is our fight or flight response and it is there for a reason.

Is Your Anxiety Affecting Your Daily Life?

Anxiety can be a problem when we experience it in a way that is extreme and seemingly without reason or that is disproportionate to what is going on around us.



Problematic anxiety can produce difficulty engaging in work, social life, or other obligations or when it produces

persistent troubling symptoms (panic, fear, repetitive thoughts, incessant worry, sleep issues, etc.). Talking with a professional about problematic anxiety is the first step in overcoming it.

Why Am I Experiencing This?

Anxiety can be affected by many factors (e.g., genetics, past experiences, current stressful events). Regardless of the cause, it is helpful to know how anxiety works. Anxiety lives in three main areas that

impact each other to create a **cycle of anxiety**.

1. **Our Thoughts**

We often never acknowledge them, but our **automatic thoughts** go a long way in informing our relationship with anxiety. Automatic thoughts are often built on assumptions and faulty thinking. Acknowledging our automatic thoughts and exposing their errors is a great first step in overcoming anxiety.

2. **Our Emotions**

Instant, uncomfortable, and we want them to go away. Understanding that emotions are often reactive to our automatic thoughts and cannot be controlled or changed can allow us to redirect our energy from “trying to control” to “trying to understand.” If we can learn to identify our emotions, we can gain good information about our automatic thoughts.

3. **Our Behaviors**

When our emotions rise and we start to feel panic, our brain starts looking for a threat in our circumstance, ignoring our thoughts all together. When it identifies the “threat” it encourages us to behave in a way that is designed to keep us safe. These **safety behaviors** (e.g., avoidance,

escapism, reassurance checking) often work in the moment to reduce intensity of emotion, but give way to new circumstances. This may add to the original automatic thought, continuing the cycle.

Example

An individual is to go out with friends. When the time comes they are filled with anxiety. Their brain incorrectly concludes that going out with friends is a threat and informs the behavior of cancelling last minute (avoidance). If they had identified the automatic thought (“I don’t belong”) and the emotion (inadequacy), they could have seen how their anxiety was built on faulty thinking, not circumstance. Furthermore, they would see how their behavior would worsen this thought over time (“You can’t belong if you never go”).

Different Types of Anxiety Disorders

Generalized Anxiety

Having excessive worry that occurs most days related to everyday things, events, or activities. This worry is difficult to control and interferes with everyday life.

Results in difficulty relaxing, concentrating, and sleeping.

Social Anxiety

Having a persistent fear of a particular social or performance situation. An intense fear of being evaluated in a negative manner by others can also be present. Someone dealing with social anxiety will choose to avoid feared situations.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is characterized by having recurring and intrusive upsetting thoughts as well as compulsive or ritualistic behaviors designed to mitigate these thoughts or relieve anxiety. These behaviors may include hand washing, arranging items, counting, specific prayers or actions, etc.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD occurs after a person experiences a traumatic event. This event may have occurred previously or happened recently. Someone dealing with PTSD may avoid reminders of the trauma.

Specific Phobias

These are intense, persistent, and excessive fears of things such as animals,

seeing blood, flying, and being in enclosed places.

Panic Attack

Having sudden episodes of intense fear in a situation that does not involve danger. The panic attack can be accompanied by a fear of dying or losing control. Someone dealing with panic attacks will worry about having additional panic attacks.

Evaluate Your Anxiety: if you find that you're checking most of these boxes most days, reach out to Student Wellness and ask to speak with a health or mental health professional.

- ☐ Frequent procrastination,
- ☐ Persistent fears of failure,
- ☐ Insisting on perfection,
- ☐ Difficulty relaxing,
- ☐ Excessive worrying,
- ☐ Overwhelming spells of panic,
- ☐ Avoiding places or situations from which escape might be difficult or embarrassing,
- ☐ Fearing something catastrophic will happen,
- ☐ Persistent concern about having anxiety attacks,
- ☐ Significant changes in behaviour as a result of anxiety,
- ☐ Avoiding certain social or performance situations,
- ☐ Intrusive thoughts and/or repetitive behaviours,
- ☐ Family and/or friends notice something is wrong,
- ☐ Depending heavily upon others because of anxiety,
- ☐ Substance use to manage anxiety,
- ☐ Missed classes and/or unmet deadlines,
- ☐ Poor or declining grades,
- ☐ Lost relationships because of anxiety, and
- ☐ Concern about own levels of anxiety.

What Are My Next Steps?

Anxiety, at any level, can be treated. The sooner you get started the faster it can be resolved. Accessing support is a necessary step regardless of what treatment you require.

Self-treatment

If you find that your anxiety tends to be reasonable and is often circumstantial, you may be able to manage well with the support of family, friends, and materials such as this. Acknowledge your automatic thoughts and ask yourself if they are faulty or valid. Challenge yourself when met with the urge to avoid anxiety provoking situations. Self-care strategies for anxiety may include: talking to someone you trust, looking after your physical health, practicing breathing exercises, keeping a diary, accessing peer support, or attending an anxiety information group.

Counselling

If you find that your anxiety is unreasonably high and producing persistent unwelcome symptoms or is compromising your ability to function in day-to-day life you may want to consider

counseling. Talking to a mental health professional can help you through the recovery process by addressing the relationships between your automatic thoughts, emotions, and safety behaviors. A counsellor can help in managing anxiety symptoms and avoidances, challenging automatic thoughts, developing strategies to address safety behaviors, and learn different ways to cope through anxiety provoking times.

Medication

If you find that the intensity of your anxiety is such that you have lost the ability to participate in your obligations (e.g., school, work, relationships), you may require medication. Medications for anxiety can help to reduce the level of intensity allowing you to effectively engage in the necessary work with your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Medication and counseling at the same time is often the quickest and most comfortable road to recovery. Speaking to a health professional about options is an appropriate first step.

Supporting a Friend Who is Anxious

- Learn more about anxiety,
- Remember that it is not your job to cure the anxiety,
- Be patient,
- Show sincere interest and optimism,
- Acknowledge the anxiety without being harsh or judgmental,
- Acknowledge any progress you see, no matter how small or slow,
- When asked, provide honest and gentle feedback,
- Offer to role play anxious situations (like speaking with a professor
- Be cautious about accompanying your friend to feared situations. Doing so may delay their realization that they can do this on their own.,
- Be aware that, in some situations, providing reassurance may actually work against improved anxiety management,
- Have fun together, and
- Encourage them to seek assistance from a physician or mental health professional. This is especially true if they are using substances to cope, self-harming, or speaking of self harming.

Your job as a friend is to be just that, a friend.
You do not need to have the answers or advice;
you can simply just listen.



Additional Resources

Evaluate Your Anxiety using Beck's Anxiety Inventory

<http://www.mydesertview.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/BeckAnxietyInventory-Ages-14.pdf>

Wellness Workshops

facilitated by Student Wellness Centre,
Student Affairs and

outreach and Peer Health Usask student
volunteers



Supports at the USask: Where to Seek Help?

- If you are wanting to book a mental health intake, or seeking same-day service contact [Student Wellness Centre: 306-966-5768](#)
- Speak with another student: Peer Health Drop-in:
peerhealthdropin@usask.ca
- For after-hours support, please contact [Saskatoon Mobile Crisis](#) at [306-933-6200](tel:306-933-6200) or [Crisis Services Canada](#) at [1-833-456-4566](tel:1-833-456-4566)

**Usask Self Health
Supports**



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