



Anxiety



[Anxiety: How to Change Anxious Thoughts, video](#)



[Anxiety: Is Treatment Right for You?, video](#)



[Anxiety: Paying Attention to How You're Doing, video](#)



[Anxiety: Treatment Options, video](#)



[Anxiety: What Is It?, video](#)

Topic Overview

Anxiety

Feeling worried or nervous is a normal part of everyday life. Everyone frets or feels anxious from time to time. Mild to moderate anxiety can help you focus your attention, energy, and motivation. If anxiety is severe, you may have feelings of helplessness, confusion, and extreme worry that are out of proportion with the actual seriousness or likelihood of the feared event. Overwhelming anxiety that interferes with daily life is not normal. This type of anxiety may be a symptom of generalized anxiety disorder, or it may be a symptom of another problem, such as [depression](#).

Anxiety can cause physical and emotional symptoms. A specific situation or fear can cause some or all of these symptoms for a short time. When the situation passes, the symptoms usually go away.

Physical symptoms of anxiety include:

- Trembling, twitching, or shaking.

- Feeling of fullness in the throat or chest.
- Breathlessness or rapid heartbeat.
- [Light-headedness](#) or [dizziness](#).
- Sweating or cold, clammy hands.
- Feeling jumpy.
- Muscle tension, aches, or soreness (myalgias).
- Extreme tiredness.
- Sleep problems, such as the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep, early waking, or restlessness (not feeling rested when you wake up).

Anxiety affects the part of the brain that helps control how you communicate. This makes it harder to express yourself creatively or function effectively in relationships. Emotional symptoms of anxiety include:

- Restlessness, irritability, or feeling on edge or keyed up.
- Worrying too much.
- Fearing that something bad is going to happen; feeling doomed.
- Inability to concentrate; feeling like your mind goes blank.

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorders occur when people have both physical and emotional symptoms. Anxiety disorders interfere with how a person gets along with others and affect daily activities. Women are twice as likely as men to have problems with anxiety disorders. Examples of anxiety disorders include panic attacks, phobias, and [generalized anxiety disorder](#).

Often the cause of anxiety disorders is not known. Many people with an anxiety disorder say they have felt nervous and anxious all their lives. This problem can occur at any age. Children who have at least one parent with the diagnosis of depression are more than twice as likely to have an anxiety disorder than other children.

Anxiety disorders often occur with other problems, such as:

- Mental health problems, such as depression.
- [Substance use](#) problems.
- A physical problem, such as heart or lung disease. A complete medical examination may be needed before an anxiety disorder can be diagnosed.

Panic attacks

A [panic attack](#) is a sudden feeling of extreme anxiety or intense fear without a clear cause or when there is no danger. Panic attacks are common. They sometimes occur in otherwise healthy people. Panic attacks usually last only a few minutes, but an attack may last longer. And for some people, the anxiety can get worse quickly during the attack.

Symptoms include feelings of dying or losing control of yourself, rapid breathing ([hyperventilation](#)), numbness or tingling of the hands or lips, and a racing heart. You may feel dizzy, sweaty, or shaky. Other symptoms include trouble breathing, chest pain or tightness, and an irregular heartbeat. These symptoms come on suddenly and without warning.

Sometimes symptoms of a panic attack are so intense that the person fears he or she is having a [heart attack](#). Many of the symptoms of a panic attack can occur with other illnesses, such as [hyperthyroidism](#), [coronary artery disease](#), or [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](#). A complete medical examination may be needed before an anxiety disorder can be diagnosed.

People who have repeated unexpected panic attacks and worry about the attacks are said to have a [panic disorder](#).

Phobias

[Phobias](#) are extreme and irrational fears that interfere with daily life. People with phobias have fears that are out of proportion to real danger, and they are not able to control them.

Phobias are common and are sometimes present with other conditions, such as panic disorder or [Tourette's disorder](#). Most people deal with phobias by avoiding the situation or object that causes them to feel panic (avoidance behaviour).

A phobic disorder occurs when the avoidance behaviour becomes so extreme that it interferes with your ability to participate in your daily activities. There are three main types of phobic disorders:

- Fear of being alone or in public places where help might not be available or escape is impossible ([agoraphobia](#))
- Fear of situations where the individual might be exposed to criticism by others ([social phobia](#))
- Fear of specific things (specific phobia)

Phobias can be treated to help reduce feelings of fear and anxiety.

[Check your symptoms](#) to decide if and when you should see a doctor.

Health Tools

Health Tools help you make wise health decisions or take action to improve your health.

Actionsets are designed to help people take an active role in managing a health condition.

- [Anxiety: Stop Negative Thoughts](#)

Check Your Symptoms

Home Treatment

Home treatment, combined with professional treatment, can help relieve [anxiety](#).

- Recognize and accept your anxiety about specific fears or situations, and then make a plan for dealing with it. For example, if you are constantly worrying about finances, set up a budget or savings plan.
- Don't dwell on past problems. Change what you can to help you feel more comfortable with present concerns, but let go of past problems or things you cannot change.
- Be kind to your body:
 - Relieve tension with exercise or massage.
 - Try stress-relief techniques that focus on relaxing your mind and your body. For more information, see the topic [Stress Management](#).
 - Get enough rest. If you have trouble sleeping, see the topic [Sleep Problems, Age 12 and Older](#).
 - Practice [healthy thinking and stop negative thoughts](#).
 - Avoid alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, and nicotine. They may increase your anxiety level. Some illegal drugs, such as cocaine, crack, and speed (amphetamines), also can cause anxiety.
- Engage your mind:
 - Get out and do something you enjoy, such as going to a funny movie or taking a walk or hike.
 - Plan your day. Having too much or too little to do can make you more anxious.
 - Keep a [diary of your symptoms](#). Discuss your fears with a good friend. Confiding in others sometimes relieves stress.
- Get involved in social groups, or volunteer to help others. Being alone can make things seem worse than they are.
- Learn about resources available in your community:
 - Talk with your human resources officer about counselling benefits that may be available through your employee assistance program.
 - Check with your insurance company to see what mental health benefits are available.
 - Contact your local health unit for information on community mental health programs.

Symptoms to watch for during home treatment

[Call your doctor](#) if symptoms become more frequent or severe during home treatment.

Prevention

You can help prevent [anxiety](#) attacks:

- Avoid caffeine, especially in coffees, teas, colas, energy drinks, and chocolate. Caffeine can keep you in a tense, aroused condition. For more information, see the topic [Healthy Eating](#).
- Do not smoke or use smokeless (spit) tobacco products. Nicotine stimulates many physical and psychological processes, causes your blood vessels to constrict, and makes your heart work harder. For more information, see the topic [Quitting Smoking](#).
- Exercise during the day. Even a brisk walk around the block may help you stay calm. For more information, see the topic [Fitness](#).

Talk with your doctor about your symptoms of anxiety or panic. A licensed counsellor or other health professional can help you find ways to reduce your symptoms with techniques such as biofeedback, hypnosis, or [cognitive-behavioural therapy](#).

Preparing For Your Appointment

To prepare for your appointment, see the topic [Making the Most of Your Appointment](#).

You can help your doctor diagnose and treat your condition by being prepared to answer the following questions:

- What is your major symptom?
- How long have you had your symptoms? Do they come and go, or are they always present?
- What triggers the onset of your symptoms?
- What makes your symptoms better or worse?
- Do you have other symptoms that may be related to your major symptom? These other symptoms may include:
 - Rapid or irregular heartbeat.
 - Nausea or vomiting.
 - Numbness or weakness.
 - Excessive sweating.
 - Feeling that you are not able to get enough air (air hunger).
 - Restlessness, irritability, or feeling on edge.
 - Feeling depressed.
- Have you ever had a similar problem in the past? If so, how was it treated?
- Has anyone else in your family ever been diagnosed with an [anxiety disorder](#), depression, or another mental illness?
- Has anyone in your family tried suicide or died by suicide?

- What home treatment measures have you tried? Did they help?
- What prescription or non-prescription medicines are you currently using?
- What herbal supplements are you taking?
- Are you using alcohol or cannabis (marijuana), or illegal drugs such as cocaine, to manage your symptoms?
- Do you smoke or use other tobacco products?
- Do you have any [health risks](#)?

While waiting for your appointment, it may be helpful to keep a [diary of your symptoms](#) .

Related Information

- [Dizziness: Light-Headedness and Vertigo](#)
- [Feeling Depressed](#)

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