

What is anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety. And that's a good thing! Anxiety helps you prepare for important events or react to dangerous situations. You may feel anxious when you write an exam, go on a first date, try river rafting or have an argument with a friend. Your body's response to the anxiety helps you handle these events.

So what's bad about anxiety? If your anxiety is too intense or it lasts too long it may begin to interfere with your life. For example, if you constantly worry about things that are unlikely to happen then you may not have energy to spend time with your friends, enjoy your favorite activities or focus on your schoolwork.

Anxiety is more than just being "stressed out" and there are many types of anxiety.

- Generalized anxiety disorder is overwhelming worry and fear about things that might go wrong even when there are no signs of trouble.
- Phobias are irrational and extreme fears associated with specific situations or things.
- Social phobia is an intense fear of being humiliated in social situations, specifically of embarrassing yourself in front of other people.
- Obsessive-compulsive disorders are unwanted, repetitive thoughts and/or behaviours.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder is an intense and lasting reaction to serious, threatening events, such as tornadoes, accidents, or violence.

All of these anxiety disorders can interfere with your daily activities and cause you to avoid certain situations. They can also cause panic attacks, which look and feel like a heart attack with shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, shakiness and sweating. They can be very frightening but they last only a short time and are not life-threatening.

Dealing with anxiety

If anxiety is not treated it can lead to more serious problems. There are many strategies that you can try.

Be honest with yourself and others

Bottling things up is likely to keep your anxiety level high. Talk about your worries with someone you trust. Work out a plan to face your fears. If you avoid uncomfortable situations the anxiety can grow even stronger.

Yoga...it's not just for old people

Yoga, meditation, breathing exercises and other relaxation techniques can help you to feel calm. You can practice this breathing exercise and use it when you begin to feel anxious. Find a comfortable position and close your eyes. Focus only on your breathing. Each time you breathe out, relax your body. Continue for a few minutes until you feel calm and relaxed.

A hermit is a lousy career choice

Reach out to the people who care about you. Get out and see your friends. Spend time with your family. These relationships can help you control your anxiety.

Drag your butt off the couch

It's a fact that exercise helps you feel good both physically and mentally. Walk the dog, shoot some hoops or strap on some roller blades.

Catch enough ZZZZZs

Your body needs its rest but anxiety can keep you from getting a good night's sleep. Keep school work and other stressful things away from your sleeping space. Don't eat or exercise right before bedtime. Read a book or practice relaxation techniques before you go to sleep.

Drugs and alcohol...never a good idea

You might be tempted to use alcohol, drugs or stimulants, like caffeine and energy drinks, to feel better. The feeling is temporary and the after effects often make you feel worse.

Treating anxiety

If anxiety is interfering in your life and self-help strategies are not working, it is a good idea to see your doctor or another health professional. Sometimes anxiety can be controlled using medications.



Resources

There is help available 24-7 at

- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
- Mental Health Help Line: 1-877-303-2642
- HealthLink Alberta: 1-866-408-5465

Check out these websites:

www.griponlife.ca
www.kidshelpphone.ca
www.mindyourmind.ca
www.beyondblue.org.au/ybblue/
www.cmha.ca
www.moodgym.anu.edu.au
www.reachout.com.au
www.suicideinfo.ca
www.youthone.com
www.calgaryurbanvibe.ca/teenlinevibe



www.albertahealthservices.ca

Assess your anxiety

In the past two to four weeks have you:

1. Felt worried, on edge, or nervous most of the time?
2. Been bothered by repetitive thoughts that are very hard to get off your mind?
3. Avoided places or activities because you felt anxious?
4. Been short of breath, had a racing heartbeat, or felt dizzy for no apparent reason?
5. Spent too much time doing things over and over?
6. Had trouble concentrating?
7. Had trouble sleeping or had bad dreams?

Score one point for each yes. The higher your score the more likely anxiety may be a problem for you. This is not a diagnostic test, but if you are concerned, talk to someone who can help.

Other signs of anxiety include:

- Tense muscles
- Restlessness
- Shakiness or trembling
- Tiredness
- Dry mouth
- Nausea or stomach aches
- Headaches
- Diarrhea
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability
- Getting overly upset when a mistake is made or if there is a change of routine
- Specific fears that interfere with daily life
- Nervous habits such as nail biting

How to help a friend who has anxiety:

Friends are often the first to notice when someone shows signs of anxiety. So as a friend, be ready to help with some simple steps. Pay attention to signs that might be anxiety, be a good listener and encourage friends to get help.

Watch for signs

Your eyes and ears are good tools to detect anxiety. A friend with an anxiety disorder may seem overly worried, jumpy or irritable. They might avoid specific places or social situations that cause anxiety. They might experience a panic attack or be afraid of having another panic attack.

Listen and reassure

Just listen and try not to judge. Don't tell them that they should not feel the way they feel. Tell them you think they might have anxiety. Reassure them that anxiety is a common mental disorder and people can get help and recover.

Help them get help

There is good help available. Encourage them to see a family doctor, a guidance counsellor or a qualified mental health therapist. Counselling can help change thoughts, behaviours and feelings to reduce anxiety, or there are many self-help strategies for anxiety. Medication can help too. If your friend won't get help, tell a responsible adult that they may need help.

Watch for more serious problems

Anxiety is a risk factor for depression and suicidal behaviour. If you are worried that a friend is thinking about suicide, get immediate help by calling a crisis line, a counsellor or telling a responsible adult.

Anxiety

It's more common than you think



It can affect anyone

Anxiety is a normal part of life, but too much can be harmful. It's what you do about it that makes a difference to your well-being.