

Coping with anxiety

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health disorders in the United States and they are highly treatable.

What is anxiety?

Everyone feels nervous or anxious at one time or another. But when frequent, powerful feelings of fear or dread cause people to feel they have lost control over their lives, they may have an anxiety disorder. Untreated anxiety disorders can interfere with job performance, school, relationships, and other areas of life.

There are several types of anxiety disorders. Examples include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder.

Signs and symptoms

People with generalized anxiety disorder may feel irritable, restless, and have trouble concentrating. Other signs and symptoms may include:

- Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness
- Fatigue
- Problems sleeping (difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless, unsatisfying sleep)
- Cold or sweaty hands and/or feet
- Difficulty controlling excessive and unrealistic worries
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Muscle tension
- Dry mouth
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- Headaches, stomachaches, nausea

People with panic disorder have recurrent unexpected panic attacks, which are sudden periods of intense fear and dread. Panic attacks often involve physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, shortness of breath, and trembling. Many people who experience panic attacks are afraid they are having a heart attack or that they are going to die.

People with social anxiety, or social phobias, are highly anxious and self-conscious when they are around other people. They have a difficult time making or keeping friends and worry that people are judging them.

How to help yourself

If you struggle with anxiety, consider an appointment with a healthcare professional to review your symptoms and history and rule out a physical cause. Some ways to reduce or manage anxious feelings include the following:

- **Prepare for upcoming events.** Rehearse situations that you think will cause anxiety, such as speaking in front of a group or having a job interview. Imagine yourself feeling calm, confident, and in control.
- **Eat healthy foods and limit caffeine.** Choose foods such as whole-grain breads and whole grain cereals instead of sugary snacks or beverages. Eat protein at breakfast, so you have energy and your blood glucose levels stay steady. Limit or avoid alcohol and caffeine, which cause anxiety after eating. Stay hydrated. Dehydration can cause mood changes.

According to a recent survey conducted by Harris Poll, 72 percent of Americans reported feeling stressed about money at least some of the time during the past month. –American Psychological Association

- **Avoid nicotine and alcohol.** Many people self-medicate with nicotine, alcohol or other drugs to reduce anxiety, but over time this makes the problem worse.
- **Exercise regularly.** Try to exercise at least 30 minutes every day. Practice relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, visualization, or meditation.
- **Talk to someone.** If you start to feel overwhelmed by your emotions, talk with a friend, family member, doctor, religious advisor, or mental health professional.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT is a specific type of therapy that is highly effective in treating anxiety disorders. The individual learns to recognize and change thought patterns and behaviors that contribute to anxiety.

Resources

[Anxiety and Depression Association of America
www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

[National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml)

[Office on Women's Health,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/anxiety-disorders](http://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/anxiety-disorders)

[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/anxiety-disorders/index.html](http://www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/anxiety-disorders/index.html)

Treatment options

Although the treatment approach will depend on the type of anxiety disorder, one or more of the following therapies may be recommended:

- **Psychotherapy:** Conducted by a psychologist, clinical social worker, psychiatrist or other trained mental health professional, psychotherapy helps people understand and cope with their anxiety.
- **Medication:** Medication used to reduce the symptoms of anxiety disorders include anxiety-reducing drugs, anti-depressants, and beta-blockers.

Help is available. For additional information, visit MagellanHealth.com/MYMH