

# Managing Anxiety, Adult

After being diagnosed with anxiety, you may be relieved to know why you have felt or behaved a certain way. You may also feel overwhelmed about the treatment ahead and what it will mean for your life. With care and support, you can manage this condition.

## How to manage lifestyle changes

### Managing stress and anxiety



Stress is your body's reaction to life changes and events, both good and bad. Most stress will last just a few hours, but stress can be ongoing and can lead to more than just stress. Although stress can play a major role in anxiety, it is not the same as anxiety. Stress is usually caused by something external, such as a deadline, test, or competition. Stress normally passes after the triggering event has ended.

Anxiety is caused by something internal, such as imagining a terrible outcome or worrying that something will go wrong that will devastate you. Anxiety often does not go away even after the triggering event is over, and it can become long-term (*chronic*) worry. It is important to understand the differences between stress and anxiety and to manage your stress effectively so that it does not lead to an anxious response.

Talk with your health care provider or a counselor to learn more about reducing anxiety and stress. He or she may suggest tension reduction techniques, such as:

- Music therapy. Spend time creating or listening to music that you enjoy and that inspires you.
- Mindfulness-based meditation. Practice being aware of your normal breaths while not trying to control your breathing. It can be done while sitting or walking.
- Centering prayer. This involves focusing on a word, phrase, or sacred image that means something to you and brings you peace.
- Deep breathing. To do this, expand your stomach and inhale slowly through your nose. Hold your breath for 3–5 seconds. Then exhale slowly, letting your stomach muscles relax.
- Self-talk. Learn to notice and identify thought patterns that lead to anxiety reactions and change those patterns to thoughts that feel peaceful.
- Muscle relaxation. Taking time to tense muscles and then relax them.

Choose a tension reduction technique that fits your lifestyle and personality. These techniques take time and practice. Set aside 5–15 minutes a day to do them. Therapists can offer counseling and training in these techniques. The training to help with anxiety may be covered by some insurance plans.

Other things you can do to manage stress and anxiety include:

- Keeping a stress diary. This can help you learn what triggers your reaction and then learn ways to manage your response.

- Thinking about how you react to certain situations. You may not be able to control everything, but you can control your response.
- Making time for activities that help you relax and not feeling guilty about spending your time in this way.
- Doing visual imagery. This involves imagining or creating mental pictures to help you relax.
- Practicing yoga. Through yoga poses, you can lower tension and promote relaxation.

## Medicines

Medicines can help ease symptoms. Medicines for anxiety include:

- Antidepressant medicines. These are usually prescribed for long-term daily control.
- Anti-anxiety medicines. These may be added in severe cases, especially when panic attacks occur.

Medicines will be prescribed by a health care provider. When used together, medicines, psychotherapy, and tension reduction techniques may be the most effective treatment.

## Relationships

Relationships can play a big part in helping you recover. Try to spend more time connecting with trusted friends and family members.

- Consider going to couples counseling if you have a partner, taking family education classes, or going to family therapy.
- Therapy can help you and others better understand your condition.

## How to recognize changes in your anxiety

Everyone responds differently to treatment for anxiety. Recovery from anxiety happens when symptoms decrease and stop interfering with your daily activities at home or work. This may mean that you will start to:

- Have better concentration and focus. Worry will interfere less in your daily thinking.
- Sleep better.
- Be less irritable.
- Have more energy.
- Have improved memory.

It is also important to recognize when your condition is getting worse. Contact your health care provider if your symptoms interfere with home or work and you feel like your condition is not improving.

## Follow these instructions at home:

### Activity

- Exercise. Adults should do the following:
  - Exercise for at least 150 minutes each week. The exercise should increase your heart rate and make you sweat (*moderate-intensity exercise*).
  - Strengthening exercises at least twice a week.
- Get the right amount and quality of sleep. Most adults need 7–9 hours of sleep each night.

### Lifestyle



- Eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein.
  - **Do not** eat a lot of foods that are high in fats, added sugars, or salt (*sodium*).
- Make choices that simplify your life.
- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco. These products include cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and vaping devices, such as e-cigarettes. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and certain over-the-counter cold medicines. These may make you feel worse. Ask your pharmacist which medicines to avoid.

### **General instructions**

- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Keep all follow-up visits. This is important.

### **Where to find support**

You can get help and support from these sources:

- Self-help groups.
- Online and community organizations.
- A trusted spiritual leader.
- Couples counseling.
- Family education classes.
- Family therapy.

### **Where to find more information**

You may find that joining a support group helps you deal with your anxiety. The following sources can help you locate counselors or support groups near you:

- Mental Health America: [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA): [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

### **Contact a health care provider if:**

- You have a hard time staying focused or finishing daily tasks.
- You spend many hours a day feeling worried about everyday life.
- You become exhausted by worry.
- You start to have headaches or frequently feel tense.
- You develop chronic nausea or diarrhea.

### **Get help right away if:**

- You have a racing heart and shortness of breath.

- You have thoughts of hurting yourself or others.

**If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. Go to your nearest emergency department or:**

- **Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **Call a suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or 988 in the U.S. This is open 24 hours a day in the U.S.**
- **Text the Crisis Text Line at 741741 (in the U.S.).**

## **Summary**

- Taking steps to learn and use tension reduction techniques can help calm you and help prevent triggering an anxiety reaction.
- When used together, medicines, psychotherapy, and tension reduction techniques may be the most effective treatment.
- Family, friends, and partners can play a big part in supporting you.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

# Managing Stress, Adult

Feeling a certain amount of stress is normal. Stress helps our body and mind get ready to deal with the demands of life. Stress hormones can motivate you to do well at work and meet your responsibilities. But severe or long-term (*chronic*) stress can affect your mental and physical health. Chronic stress puts you at higher risk for:

- Anxiety and depression.
- Other health problems such as digestive problems, muscle aches, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke.

## What are the causes?

Common causes of stress include:

- Demands from work, such as deadlines, feeling overworked, or having long hours.
- Pressures at home, such as money issues, disagreements with a spouse, or parenting issues.
- Pressures from major life changes, such as divorce, moving, loss of a loved one, or chronic illness.

You may be at higher risk for stress-related problems if you:

- Do not get enough sleep.
- Are in poor health.
- Do not have emotional support.
- Have a mental health disorder such as anxiety or depression.

## How to recognize stress

Stress can make you:

- Have trouble sleeping.
- Feel sad, anxious, irritable, or overwhelmed.
- Lose your appetite.
- Overeat or want to eat unhealthy foods.
- Want to use drugs or alcohol.

Stress can also cause physical symptoms, such as:

- Sore, tense muscles, especially in the shoulders and neck.
- Headaches.
- Trouble breathing.
- A faster heart rate.
- Stomach pain, nausea, or vomiting.
- Diarrhea or constipation.
- Trouble concentrating.

## Follow these instructions at home:

### Eating and drinking

- Eat a healthy diet. This includes:
  - Eating foods that are high in fiber, such as beans, whole grains, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Limiting foods that are high in fat and processed sugars, such as fried or sweet foods.
- **Do not** skip meals or overeat.
- Drink enough fluid to keep your urine pale yellow.

### Alcohol use

- **Do not** drink alcohol if:
  - Your health care provider tells you not to drink.
  - You are pregnant, may be pregnant, or are planning to become pregnant.
- Drinking alcohol is a way some people try to ease their stress. This can be dangerous, so if you drink alcohol:
  - Limit how much you have to:
    - 0–1 drink a day for women.
    - 0–2 drinks a day for men.
  - Know how much alcohol is in your drink. In the U.S., one drink equals one 12 oz bottle of beer (355 mL), one 5 oz glass of wine (148 mL), or one 1½ oz glass of hard liquor (44 mL).

### Activity



- Include 30 minutes of exercise in your daily schedule. Exercise is a good stress reducer.
- Include time in your day for an activity that you find relaxing. Try taking a walk, going on a bike ride, reading a book, or listening to music.
- Schedule your time in a way that lowers stress, and keep a regular schedule. Focus on doing what is most important to get done.

### Lifestyle

- Identify the source of your stress and your reaction to it. See a therapist who can help you change unhelpful reactions.
- When there are stressful events:
  - Talk about them with family, friends, or coworkers.
  - Try to think realistically about stressful events and not ignore them or overreact.
  - Try to find the positives in a stressful situation and not focus on the negatives.
  - Cut back on responsibilities at work and home, if possible. Ask for help from friends or family members if you need it.
- Find ways to manage stress, such as:
  - Mindfulness, meditation, or deep breathing.
  - Yoga or tai chi.
  - Progressive muscle relaxation.
  - Spending time in nature.
  - Doing art, playing music, or reading.
  - Making time for fun activities.
  - Spending time with family and friends.

- Get support from family, friends, or spiritual resources.

### **General instructions**

- Get enough sleep. Try to go to sleep and get up at about the same time every day.
- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco. These products include cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and vaping devices, such as e-cigarettes. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.
- **Do not** use drugs or smoke to deal with stress.
- Keep all follow-up visits. This is important.

### **Where to find support**

- Talk with your health care provider about stress management or finding a support group.
- Find a therapist to work with you on your stress management techniques.

### **Where to find more information**

- National Alliance on Mental Illness: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- American Psychological Association: [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

### **Contact a health care provider if:**

- Your stress symptoms get worse.
- You are unable to manage your stress at home.
- You are struggling to stop using drugs or alcohol.

### **Get help right away if:**

- You may be a danger to yourself or others.
- You have any thoughts of death or suicide.

**Get help right away if you feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life. Go to your nearest emergency room or:**

- **Call 911.**
- **Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or 988 in the U.S.. This is open 24 hours a day.**
- **Text the Crisis Text Line at 741741.**

### **Summary**

- Feeling a certain amount of stress is normal, but severe or long-term (*chronic*) stress can affect your mental and physical health.
- Chronic stress can put you at higher risk for anxiety, depression, and other health problems such as digestive problems, muscle aches, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke.
- You may be at higher risk for stress-related problems if you do not get enough sleep, are in poor health, lack emotional support, or have a mental health disorder such as anxiety or depression.
- Identify the source of your stress and your reaction to it. Try talking about stressful events with family, friends, or coworkers, finding a coping method, or getting support from spiritual resources.
- If you need more help, talk with your health care provider about finding a support group or a mental health

therapist.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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