

ANXIETY DISORDER

Health notes



Feeling worried, anxious, or nervous is a normal part of life. However, when anxiety starts to get in the way of your daily life, it may be time to take action.

Anxiety disorder is a condition that affects your thoughts, feelings, moods, and body. About 40 million American adults, 18 and older, have an anxiety disorder¹. Certain life events or fear can cause some or all of these symptoms for a short time. When the event passes, the symptoms should go away.

Symptoms

Anxiety disorder can show up in four different ways:

Physical changes

- Trembling, twitching, or shaking
- Lightheadness or dizziness
- Muscle tension, aches, or soreness

Anxiety-related thoughts

- Panic or fear of panic
- Constant thoughts of worry
- Fear of losing control

Behaviors

- Having unreal expectations
- Avoiding stress or stressful situations
- Easily irritated or quick to anger

Emotional changes

- Fear that bad things will happen
- Poor concentration
- Often sad

Types of anxiety disorders

Phobia and panic disorders

Phobias are fear of common places, objects or situations. Panic disorders cause feelings of fear even though there is no clear cause or danger. During a panic attack, you may notice:

- faster breathing,
- shaking,
- faintness, or
- increase heart beat.

Post-traumatic stress and obsessive-compulsive disorder

After a traumatic event, such as war or abuse, people can develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD can cause:

- nightmares,
- abnormal thoughts,
- emotional numbness or withdrawal,
- difficulty sleeping, or
- unwanted flashbacks of the traumatic event.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a condition that causes a person to:

- have repeated and unwanted thoughts, or
- display repeated and unwanted actions.

Self-care techniques

Learning new lifestyle skills can give you relief from anxiety. Your doctor can talk to you about what treatment options are best for you. Treatments options may include medicines as well as therapy.

Reach out

- Anxiety is stressful and facing it can be a challenge. Talk to loved ones, family members or friends who can support you.

Self talk

- Try to calm yourself by using this phrase: “This is not an emergency. I do not feel well, but I am not in danger. I can keep going, even though I feel anxious.”

Engage your mind

- Get out and do something you enjoy, such as going to a funny movie or taking a walk or a hike.
- Plan your day. Having too much or too little to do can make you more anxious.

Beware of anxiety triggers

Avoid things or situations that may trigger anxiety. There are five factors that often trigger anxiety:

- family history of anxiety,
- chemicals (e.g. caffeine, nicotine),
- external stress (e.g. school or work deadlines),
- self-demands (e.g. unrealistic goals), and
- past events.

For more information

Visit kp.org/health

- Read about Anxiety and Generalized Anxiety Disorder in the Health encyclopedia.

Visit kp.org/healthylifestyles

- Sign up for our online Healthy Lifestyle program HealthMedia® Relax™ for tips to reduce and manage stress.

Visit kp.org/healthyliving

- Stretch your knowledge, maybe even your body. Use our online tools and learn more from our featured health topics.

Visit kp.org/classes

- Join a class to discover new ways to deal with familiar challenges.

Get moving

Exercise can help your anxiety. Try to get 150 minutes of moderate intense physical activity each week. You can split up your activities into different times or days. The more you move, the easier it is to reduce your anxiety.

Deep breathing

Take slow, deep breaths to reduce your anxiety symptoms. Try this exercise when you are feeling anxious:

- Count to four as you breathe in deeply through your nose.
- Breathe out even more slowly through your nose for eight seconds.
- Continue to breathe deeply and count each breath for a few minutes.

When to call your doctor

- If anxiety keeps you from doing your daily activities.
- If symptoms of anxiety are still severe after one week of home treatment.
- If you are considering harming yourself or someone else.

¹*National Institutes of Mental Health (2010).*
www.nimh.nih.gov/

Call Kaiser Permanente Medical Advice

- Talk to your medical advice nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling (703) 359-7878 or 1-800-777-7904, TTY: (703) 359-7616 or 1-800-700-4901.

Other internet resources

www.adaa.org

- Anxiety Disorders Association of America

www.nimh.nih.gov

- National Institute of Mental Health

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent medical problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your personal physician or member of your health care team.