

Anxiety

Anxiety in and of itself is not a good or bad thing. It is a normal human emotion, an emotion that most people experience from time to time. People feel anxious when facing stress, uncertainty, danger, or difficulty in their lives. When people feel anxious, they may use a variety of words to describe the feeling: worried, scared, nervous, unsettled, jittery, or uneasy. They might say that they are filled with a sense of dread or doom. Anxiety serves a purpose, just like other emotions, and it can even be helpful. If we are truly in danger, or even just facing a difficult or uncomfortable situation or task, anxiety provides us with a sort of warning; it lets us know to be prepared, to be cautious, to be serious, or to take steps to protect ourselves. Anxiety is not always helpful, however, and it can become a chronic problem for some people. Anxiety disorders are, in fact, one of the most common mental health concerns. A person may be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder if they feel anxious on a consistent basis, if they have difficulty controlling or managing their anxiety, if their anxiety causes them to avoid or withdraw from certain situations, if it causes significant distress, or interferes with their ability to function. The following is a brief description of some common anxiety disorders:

Generalized Anxiety: Anxiety that shifts and can latch onto anything and everything – health, money, relationships, family, work, or other things. People with generalized anxiety often feel tired, they have sleep difficulties, they experience muscle tension, and they have trouble controlling their worries and fears.

Social Anxiety: Anxiety about social situations and interactions. People with this type of anxiety fear being judged by others. They may avoid social situations and feel embarrassed, self-conscious, and afraid when they engage in social interactions. They experience physical symptoms too: heart pounding, sweating, shakiness, or dry mouth.

Specific Phobia: anxiety about one specific thing, such as flying in an airplane, crowded places, animals, driving, dental or medical procedures, etc. People will avoid these things or situations as often as possible. Their anxiety will increase when they are exposed to the thing they fear.

Panic Disorder: people with this disorder experience unexpected panic attacks and live in fear of having another panic attack. Symptoms of a panic attack include: heart palpitations, difficulty breathing and shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea, chills or sweats, and fear of dying. Some people also develop agoraphobia, which is when they begin to avoid going to public places for fear that a panic attack will occur.

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There are many effective tools and strategies for managing chronic anxiety. Here are some helpful steps to take when you are in a state of high anxiety:

1. See if you can mentally take a step away from the anxiety. Remind yourself that you what you are experiencing is called anxiety, and even though it is unpleasant and uncomfortable, it will pass. Creating even a small space between yourself and the anxiety will help the anxiety from spiraling even further out of your control.
2. Place one hand over your stomach and one hand over your chest, close your eyes, and focus your attention on your breathing. The warmth of your own hands can be calming and by closing your eyes, you will take a break from any environmental distractions or stimuli that may contribute to your anxiety. Doing this may also slow your heart rate down and make your breathing steadier.
3. Talk with someone you trust. Let them know that you are feeling anxious and need support. High anxiety can be scary, and it is easier to withstand when we are not completely alone.
4. Try to get some exercise. Sometimes, when our minds are spinning fast and are filled with worries, fears, and doubts, the best thing to do is to get our blood pumping and our hearts beating. You will be pleased to find that your mind will quiet down and you will feel more centered and relaxed.
5. Do something with your hands, such as coloring, sculpting something out of clay, gardening, working with tools, playing a musical instrument, or even doing housework. Becoming engaged in another activity helps to take the focus off the anxiety.
6. Listen to music - music that is either gentle or calming, or that you generally find positive and uplifting.

If you experience chronic anxiety, it can also be helpful to seek counseling. A counselor can work with you on developing longer term goals and strategies for managing anxiety. For example, your counselor may teach you different breathing and relaxation techniques, may help you to identify and monitor thoughts and beliefs you have about yourself and the world that are connected to your anxiety, and may also talk with you about medications that are used to treat anxiety.

[TED Talk: How to make stress your friend](#)

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