

## Counselling

An effective form of counselling for anxiety is cognitive-behavioural therapy (or 'CBT'). CBT teaches you how your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours work together. A goal of CBT is to identify and change the unhelpful patterns of thinking that feed anxious thoughts. CBT can help you identify problem behaviours and replace them with helpful strategies. It's often the first treatment to try for mild or moderate problems with anxiety.

## Medication

Some people also find antianxiety or antidepressant medication helpful. Medication can help with the physical feelings of anxiety. It may also make anxious thoughts less frequent or intense, so it can be easier to learn helpful coping strategies. Some people take medication until their anxiety is controlled enough to try therapies like CBT.

## Support groups

Support groups—in person or online—may be a good place to share your experiences, learn from others, and connect with people who understand.

## Self-help strategies

Many different skills can help people manage anxiety, such as stress management, problem-solving, and relaxation. Mindfulness—developing awareness of the present moment without judgement—may also help. Practices that support wellness, such as eating well, exercising, having fun, and connecting with others, are also important.

## HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE?

Supporting a loved one who is experiencing an anxiety disorder can be difficult. You may not understand why your loved one feels or acts a certain way. Some people who experience an anxiety disorder feel like they have to do things a certain way or avoid things or situations, and this can create frustration or conflict with others. You may feel pressured to take part in these behaviours or adjust your own behaviours to protect or avoid upsetting a loved one. Support can be a delicate balance, but you should expect recovery—in time.

Here are some general tips:

- Remind yourself that the illness is the problem—anger, frustration, or behaviours related to anxiety are nobody's fault.
- Be patient—learning and practicing new coping strategies takes time.
- If your loved one is learning new skills, offer to help them practice.
- Listen and offer support, but avoid pushing unwanted advice.
- Set boundaries and seek support for yourself, if needed.
- If other family members are affected by a loved one's anxiety disorder, consider seeking family counselling.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness.

**Visit the CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) today.**



**Canadian Mental Health Association**  
*Mental health for all*

Development of this brochure  
generously supported by



© 2014 56319-05/14

# ANXIETY DISORDERS



**Canadian Mental Health Association**  
*Mental health for all*

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

We all feel nervous or worried at times. This anxiety can be a helpful feeling when it motivates us or warns us of danger. An anxiety disorder, on the other hand, causes unexpected or unhelpful anxiety that seriously impacts our lives, including how we think, feel, and act.

An anxiety disorder causes unexpected or unhelpful anxiety that seriously impacts our lives, including how we think, feel, and act.

## WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety disorders are mental illnesses. The different types of anxiety disorders include:

### Phobias

A phobia is an intense fear around a specific thing like an object, animal, or situation. Most of us are scared of something, but these feelings don't disrupt our lives. With phobias, people change the way they live in order to avoid the feared object or situation.

### Panic disorder

Panic disorder involves repeated and unexpected panic attacks. A panic attack is a feeling of sudden and intense fear that lasts for a short period of time. It causes a lot of physical feelings like a racing heart, shortness of breath, or nausea. Panic attacks can be a normal reaction to a stressful situation, or a part of other anxiety disorders. With panic disorder, panic attacks seem to happen for no reason. People who experience panic disorder fear more panic attacks and may worry that something bad will happen as a result of the panic attack. Some people change their routine to avoid triggering more panic attacks.

### Agoraphobia

Agoraphobia is fear of being in a situation where a person can't escape or find help if they experience a panic attack or other feelings of anxiety. A person with agoraphobia may avoid public places or even avoid leaving their homes.

### Social anxiety disorder

Social anxiety disorder involves intense fear of being embarrassed or evaluated negatively by others. As a result, people avoid social situations. This is more than shyness. It can have a big impact on work or school performance and relationships.

### Generalized anxiety disorder

Generalized anxiety disorder is excessive worry around a number of everyday problems for more than six months. This anxiety is often far greater than expected—for example, intense anxiety over a minor concern. Many people experience physical symptoms too, including muscle tension and sleep problems.

## OTHER MENTAL ILLNESSES

Some mental illnesses are no longer classified as anxiety disorders, though anxiety or fear is a major part of the illnesses.

### Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is made up of unwanted thoughts, images, or urges that cause anxiety (obsessions) or repeated actions meant to reduce that anxiety (compulsions). Obsessions or compulsions usually take a lot of time and cause a lot of distress.

### Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur after a very scary or traumatic event, such as abuse, an accident, or a natural disaster. Symptoms of PTSD include reliving the event through nightmares or flashbacks, avoiding reminders of the traumatic event, and feeling unsafe in the world, even when a person isn't in danger.



## WHO DO THEY AFFECT?

Anxiety disorders can affect anyone at any age, and they are the most common mental health problem. Sometimes, anxiety disorders are triggered by a specific event or stressful life experience. Anxiety disorders may be more likely to occur when we have certain ways of looking at things (like believing that everything must be perfect) or learn unhelpful coping strategies from others. But sometimes there just doesn't seem to be a reason.

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THEM?

Many people who experience an anxiety disorder think that they should just be able to 'get over it' on their own. Others may need time to recognize how deeply anxiety affects their life. However, anxiety disorders are real illnesses that affect a person's well-being. It's important to talk to a doctor about mental health concerns. Some physical health conditions cause symptoms of anxiety. A doctor will look at all possible causes of anxiety.

Normal, expected anxiety is part of being human. Treatment should look at reducing unhelpful coping strategies and building healthy behaviours that help you better manage anxiety.

Each anxiety disorder has its own specific treatments and goals, but most include some combination of the following strategies: