

What you need to know about Anxiety and Mood Disorders

WHAT IS IT?

Anxiety is a natural response to a stressful or dangerous situation. The body reacts to a situation with a racing heart, sweaty palms, and shortness of breath. For those with an anxiety disorder, this reaction is more intense and can occur frequently, lasting hours and even days.

Individuals with anxiety disorders tend to avoid anxiety-provoking situations and often have difficulty with relationships, school or work performance, social activities, and recreation.

HOW PREVALENT IS IT?

Anxiety disorders affect 12 percent of the population, making it the most common mental illness in Canada. For a variety of reasons, some individuals may not seek treatment for their anxiety, even though it can be treated through many different and effective means.

WHO IS AT RISK?

If you have a family member with an anxiety disorder, you have a higher chance of developing one.

WHAT ARE RISK FACTORS and TRIGGERS?

Anxiety disorders can be the result of a number of factors including genetics (children of adults with an anxiety disorder have a higher risk of developing one), psychological (individual has a tendency to overestimate danger) and experiences (such as an embarrassing moment or a traumatic event).

Anxiety may co-exist with depression or bipolar disorder and make coping with either more difficult. It is important that symptoms of anxiety and a mood disorder be treated.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

GAD is characterized by excessive and uncontrollable anxiety and worry about events or activities. It is characterized as being present for the sufferer

most days for a period of at least six months. It includes physical symptoms such as irritability and sleep disturbance.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

This is characterized by flashbacks (re-experiencing of events), a persistent avoidance of people and places that remind one of the event. Present are increased sensitivity, difficulty concentrating, anger, and jumpiness in response to the terrifying experience in which physical harm occurred or was threatened.

Social Phobia

Individuals experience great fear of social situations where they believe they may be judged negatively, or that they may make a fool of themselves, and which interferes with relationships, work and school performance.

Panic Disorder

Individuals have repeated panic attacks which feature physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, and trembling, along with avoidance of places and situations that cause the anxiety.

Specific Phobia

Individuals may experience only a specific fear such as flying, or spiders, or escalators, without the specific anxiety crossing into other areas of their lives.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessions are uninvited, intrusive thoughts, such as concern or doubt, that are time-consuming and energy-intensive and so cause distress to the individual.

Compulsions are behaviours or rituals such as repeated handwashing or checking on things as an attempt to reduce obsessive thoughts.

WHAT DO I NEED TO TELL MY DOCTOR?

- ◇ Write down symptoms you've had and in which situations
- ◇ Write down key personal information
- ◇ Make a list of all medications you are taking
- ◇ Write down questions to ask your doctor
- ◇ Take a family member or friend along

Discuss all of your symptoms with your doctor and describe how they are affecting your life (such as racing

thoughts that cause you to lose focus and not get things done). Your doctor can suggest or provide appropriate therapy. Based on your symptoms, discuss all of the available treatments and medications and their benefits and side effects before making any decisions.

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS FOR TREATMENT?

The most common forms of treatment for anxiety disorders include medication, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or a combination of the two, along with exposure therapy. Individuals can almost always be treated without being admitted to a hospital.

CBT is a problem-focused treatment that allows the individual to change unproductive thought patterns and gain control over unwanted behaviours. It may also be worth exploring relaxation techniques to reduce stress. Additional activities such as massage, mindfulness meditation, shiatsu, therapeutic touch, aromatherapy, tai chi, pilates, and yoga may also help to improve wellness.

Exposure therapy, also known as desensitization treatment, is a systematic process wherein an individual with a fear or phobia is taught relaxation techniques and is then gradually exposed to the object of fear until it can be tolerated. Over time, the fear response is extinguished.

Medications typically include antidepressants such as SSRIs (selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors) and benzodiazepines. Don't give up if one drug treatment fails; another may prove to be effective, even a drug of a similar type. Drug combinations may be tried if a single drug does not provide relief. Because some anxiety disorders are chronic, drug therapy may be needed for prolonged periods, even years.

Complementary therapy such as peer support groups and other support programs may also be helpful.

WHAT ARE THINGS I CAN DO?

- ◇ **Stick to your treatment plan.** Don't skip psychotherapy sessions. Even if you're feeling well, continue to take medication as prescribed.
- ◇ **Learn about anxiety disorders.** Empower yourself by learning about your condition.
- ◇ **Pay attention to the warning signs.** Find out what triggers your anxiety. Make a plan so that you know what to do if your symptoms get worse. Contact your doctor or therapist if you notice any changes. Ask friends or family to watch out for warning signs.

- ◇ **Exercise.** Physical activity may help reduce anxiety. Consider walking, running, swimming, gardening, or other physical activity.
- ◇ **Maintain a proper diet.** The Canada Food Guide is a helpful reference in helping you choose how to eat well.
- ◇ **Avoid alcohol and drugs.** It may seem like they lessen your worries, but generally may make your anxiety worse and harder to treat.
- ◇ **Get adequate and proper sleep.** This is especially important. If you're having trouble sleeping, talk to your doctor about what you can do.

WHAT CAN I RESEARCH?

- ◇ *10 Simple Solutions to Panic*, M. Antony & R. McCabe. (2004)
- ◇ *An End to Panic: Breakthrough Techniques for Overcoming Panic Disorder* (2nd edition), E. Znercher-White (1998)
- ◇ *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (4th Edition). E.J. Bourne (2005)
- ◇ *Getting Control: Overcoming your Obsessions and Compulsions*. L. Baer (2001)
- ◇ *The OCD Workbook: Your Guide to Breaking Free from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, B.M. Hyman and C. Pedrick (1999)
- ◇ *Mind over Mood*, D. Greenberger and C. Pedesky (1995)
- ◇ *Reclaiming your Life from a Traumatic Experience* (workbook), B.O. Rothbaum, E.B. Foa and E.A. Hembree (2007)
- ◇ *The Shyness & Social Anxiety Workbook* (2nd edition) Antony & Swinson (2008)
- ◇ *The Worry Control Workbook*, E. Copeland (2003)
- ◇ *The Feeling Good Handbook*, David D. Burns (1999)

WHERE CAN I GO TO LEARN MORE?

Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada

www.anxietycanada.ca

Anxiety Disorders Association of Ontario

www.anxietydisordersontario.ca

MAC Anxiety Research Centre (McMaster University)

www.macanxiety.com

Social Phobia/Social Anxiety Association

www.socialphobia.org

The Ontario Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Network

www.ocdontario.org

The Panic Center

www.paniccenter.net

Central Toronto Youth Services - Pride & Prejudice

ctys.org/program/pride-prejudice/

WES For Youth Online - Virtual Counselling

wesforyouthonline.ca/virtual-counselling-2/

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre - Anxiety

sunnybrook.ca/content/?page=anxiety-resources-information

Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences - Chelsea's Story

www.ontarioshores.ca/chelseas-anxiety-no-longer-defines-her

Hope + Me - MDAO provides peer support, information, and education. Our services are not intended as a replacement for other treatment options. We encourage individuals to seek treatment from a qualified health professional.

Hope + Me - Mood Disorders Association of Ontario

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