

Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety at times. It is our body's *natural response* to a threat (sometimes called the 'fight-flight-freeze' response). Our body releases adrenalin in response to a real danger or to something that feels threatening or dangerous. Our heart rate increases and blood shifts to our large muscles. All this prepares our body to respond to the danger by fighting, fleeing (flight), or freezing.

Normally, anxiety goes away once the threat is gone. Anxiety can become a problem when a person continues to have worrying thoughts or reacts as if there is a danger when no real danger exists.

What causes anxiety?

It is different for every person. Any number of situations can cause you to feel anxious, worried, or tense.

There are things that can make your anxiety response worse:

- Medical conditions such as thyroid problems, heart or lung problems, seizure disorders
- Stopping certain medicines on your own (without your doctor knowing)
- Being dependant on or addicted to alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines, tranquilizers, or heroin
- Always telling yourself the worst will happen

You are more likely to feel anxiety if:

- You have a family history of problems with anxiety.
- You have an imbalance of certain chemicals in your brain.

What are the signs of anxiety?

Many people do not recognize what they are feeling as being signs of anxiety. Instead, they think something is physically 'wrong' with them.



Anxiety can affect your body, your thoughts, and your behaviour.

- Possible body responses
 - Fast, pounding heart
 - Rapid breathing, shortness of breath
 - Chest pain or discomfort
 - Sweating
 - Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
 - Dry mouth, nausea, stomach upset
 - Pale
 - Muscle tension
 - Trembling, shaking
 - Numbness and tingling
 - Hot or cold flashes
- Possible thoughts
 - Having frightening dreams or thoughts
 - Overestimating the chances something bad will happen
 - Magnifying how bad the situation is or how bad a future situation will be
 - Not believing you can cope
 - Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Possible behaviours
 - Using alcohol or drugs to lessen the anxiety
 - Needing others to reassure you all the time
 - Needing to be with a 'safe' person
 - Staying away from certain places, activities or people

When should you get help?

Ask yourself the following question (Choose the number that most reflects your feelings.)

Over the last two weeks, how much have I been bothered by feeling anxious, worried, nervous, or tense?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
(None) (A little) (Moderate) (Severe)

If you scored 3 or lower

- You are probably coping pretty well with your anxiety. If you feel you would like more help than this sheet gives you, please talk to someone you trust.

If you scored between 4 and 7

- It would be good for you to talk to your health care provider or a mental health professional about how you are feeling.

To find a mental health professional, contact the Canadian Mental Health Association.

☎ 604- 688-3234 or 1-800-555-8222

✉ info@cmha.bc.ca 🌐 www.cmha.bc.ca

If you scored 8 or higher

You are probably very anxious. See your family doctor or a mental health professional as soon as possible.

How can anxiety affect my heart failure?

The increased heart rate and blood pressure adds stress on your heart.

Anxiety needs energy. Anxiety can increase your blood sugar and cholesterol. Both can make your heart failure worse.

Anxiety can make it hard to sleep, leaving you feeling more tired.

What can you do when you have mild anxiety?

It is not unusual for someone with a health condition such as heart failure to feel scared, worried, or tense. Included below are some ideas to help you deal with your anxiety.

For more detailed help on how to manage your anxiety, see the resources on the next page.

Sometimes when people feel very anxious and overwhelmed, they start to think about hurting themselves. If you have started to make a plan to hurt yourself, go to the nearest emergency room right away.

Support for those in crisis

Crisis Line Association of BC

1-800-784-2433 or 1-800-SUICIDE

Some Ideas on How to Manage Your Anxiety

- ✓ Be aware how you experience anxiety.
- ✓ Identify things that trigger your anxiety.
 - Ask yourself "Is this really a threat or a danger?"
- ✓ Ask yourself if your worry is something you have some control over. If it is, try to resolve it. If it isn't, let it go.
- ✓ Practice deep breathing and other forms of relaxation such as:
 - Meditation, yoga, and stretching, praying, reading, going for a walk, listening to music
- ✓ Eat a healthy well balanced diet.
- ✓ Get a good night sleep.
 - Do not drink caffeine close to bed time.
- ✓ Reduce any stress in your life.
- ✓ Reduce things that stimulate your body:
 - Reduce the amount of caffeine you drink (coffee, tea, colas) in a day.
 - Do not smoke cigarettes.
- ✓ Set a routine for doing daily activities
- ✓ Use a calendar and a 'to do' list to help you manage your time.
- ✓ If you are having a bad day, talk to someone you can trust.

Never use alcohol, tobacco, or street drugs to help you manage your anxiety

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This handout is based on patient education materials originally co-created by Cardiac Services BC and the BC Heart Failure Network in 2012

How do we know when anxiety is a problem?

Sometimes anxiety and worry can become so severe that a person develops an anxiety disorder. A doctor or mental health professional can tell if you are suffering from an anxiety disorder by asking you a number of questions.

Sometimes blood tests are done to see if a medical condition is making the anxiety worse.

How is moderate to severe anxiety treated?

Anxiety disorders respond well to treatment. Treatment can include:

- Counselling
- Support group
- Behaviour therapy (focusing on thinking and behaviour)
- Exposure therapy (focusing on facing the situation in a safe environment)
- Medications to treat any chemical imbalance in your brain

For more information on Anxiety, check these resources

AnxietyBC

www.anxietybc.com

- To learn more about anxiety, select the 'Adults' tab.
- For specific resources, select the 'Resources' tab.
 - Select 'Resource Documents' from the list on the left.
 - Scroll down to the 'Helpful "How To" Documents for Self-Help' for topics such as:
 - 'What is Anxiety?'
 - 'Tips for Healthy Living'
 - 'Self-Help Strategies for GAD (Generalized Anxiety Disorder)'
- To watch a video about Generalized Anxiety Disorder:
 - Select the 'Adults' tab.
 - Select 'Generalized Anxiety Disorder' on the left.
 - Click on the video link on the page.
- To download the 'MindShift' mobile app:
 - Select the 'Resources' tab.
 - Select 'Mobile App' from the list on the left.
 - Scroll to the bottom and download either from the iTunes App Store or Google Play.

HealthLinkBC

www.healthlinkbc.ca

- Look for 'Anxiety' under the 'Health Topic A-Z' tab.

Here-to-Help

www.heretohelp.bc.ca

- To learn more about mental health wellness, select 'Self-Help Resources'.
 - Under 'Resource Type' on the left, select 'Workbooks'.
 - Scroll down to find 'Wellness Module 1: Mental Health Matters' workbook.

Positive Coping with Health Conditions - A Self-Care Workbook

www.comh.ca/pchc/

- Choose to download the complete workbook or selected excerpts from the workbook such as 'Managing Worry' or 'Relaxation'.

Books

Local book stores or www.amazon.ca

- 'Coping with Anxiety: 10 Simple Ways to Relieve Anxiety, Fear, and Worry' by Edmund Bourne and Lorna Garano (2013)
- 'The Anxiety And Phobia Workbook' by Edmund Bourne (2010)