

Are you feeling anxious?

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling of uneasiness, fear, or worry and is the body's natural response to danger. Anxiety is the alarm bell that goes off when you feel threatened, are under pressure, or are facing a difficult situation.

It's common to feel anxious sometimes

A little bit of anxiety can help at times. For example, it can help you stay focused and alert in situations that need your full attention like preparing for an exam or when in danger.

When your anxiety feels too strong or overwhelming, and begins to interfere with your life, it's not helpful. For example, you constantly feel worried or on edge, or you begin to avoid situations or your favourite activities.

Signs of anxiety

Anxiety affects everyone differently and no two people will have the same symptoms. Here are some common signs of anxiety.

Physical

- Pounding heart
- Tense muscles
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea or stomach ache

Behaviour

- Avoiding situations or activities
- Needing to be reassured
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little

Thoughts

- Racing thoughts
- Trouble concentrating
- Constant worrying

Mood

- Irritable
- Restless
- Feeling on edge or nervous

Managing anxiety

When you're feeling anxious, there are several self-help strategies that you can try. Here are a few examples:

Relaxation Techniques

- » **Calm Breathing:** Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Take a slow breath in through your nose, expand your belly as you breathe in, and slowly count to 5. Breathe out through your mouth and slowly count to 5 as you exhale. Repeat this 5 times. To help you pay attention to your breathing, try placing one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.
- » **Focus on the Present:** Worries and anxious thoughts are usually focused on the past or the future. Bring your attention to the present. Be aware of your breathing, how your body feels, the sights and sounds around you. If you have anxious thoughts while doing this, acknowledge them then gently bring your focus back to the present.
- » **Mental Vacation:** Take a few deep breaths. Close your eyes and imagine yourself somewhere that makes you feel calm (e.g., sunny beach, a mountain, friend's home). Use your senses when thinking about yourself there—What do you hear? Smell? See?

Challenge your Thinking

- » **Challenge your Thoughts:** Your thoughts can affect how you feel, they can make you feel anxious or they can help you feel calm. Write down things you can say to encourage yourself when you start feeling anxious (e.g., “I can do this.”, “I’ve felt this way before and it turned out okay.”, “This is my anxiety talking, I don’t have to listen to it”).
- » **Accept Uncertainty:** It’s common to have anxious thoughts when you’re feeling uncertain about the future. These thoughts can take the form of ‘What if’ questions and may lead to behaviours such as rechecking things or constantly needing reassurance from others. Work on feeling more comfortable with the unknown. Ask yourself, “What’s the chance that ___ will happen? If it did, how would I handle it?”
- » **Make Time to Worry:** Take 15 minutes each day for ‘worry time’. This can help you gain control over your thoughts. If anxious thoughts come up during the day, write them down and look at them during your ‘worry time’.
- » **Find a Distraction:** Do activities that help take your mind off your anxiety (e.g., take a yoga class, go for a run, have a warm bath, or watch a funny movie or show).



Just a few minutes of physical activity can help decrease anxiety.

Healthy Habits

- » **Be Active:** Pick activities you enjoy (e.g., riding your bike, going for a walk, skate boarding, or taking fitness classes). If you haven’t been active in a while, don’t overdo it, start small and set realistic goals.
- » **Sleep Well:** Only use your bed for sleeping, turn off all electronics, and do something relaxing to unwind before bed (e.g., write in a journal, listen to calming music). Go to bed and wake up the same time every day, and try to keep your bedroom cool and dark.
- » **Eat Well:** Start your day with a nutritious breakfast, eat regular meals, and drink plenty of water to keep your energy up. Avoid caffeine from drinks such as pop, tea, coffee, or energy drinks. Too much caffeine can make you feel anxious.
- » **Avoid Alcohol and Other Drugs:** You might be tempted to use alcohol or other drugs to feel better. They may seem to help at first, but can make anxiety worse in the long run.
- » **Connect with Others:** Spend time with family and friends; positive relationships can help you control your anxiety.

If self-help strategies aren’t working and anxiety is affecting important areas of your life (e.g., you’re missing school or avoiding friends and family) talk to someone you trust—a friend, parent, teacher, or a health care professional.

If you don’t know where to turn or you want speak to someone in private, you can call:
(available in Alberta 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Kids Help Phone: **1-800-668-6868**

Mental Health Help Line: **1-877-303-2642**

Health Link: **811**

If you’re having thoughts of harming yourself or others, it’s important you get help right away. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Anxiety Resources

youth.anxietybc.com

kidshealth.org

www.kidshelpphone.ca

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