

ANXIETY

TOOLBOX TALK

Experiencing occasional anxiety is an everyday part of life. Spending a short amount of time thinking about bills that are due or an upcoming family get together that may go wrong is perfectly normal. But have you ever had a thought that starts out normally and then spirals seemingly out of control? You find yourself down a deep rabbit hole thinking of every possible situation that could go wrong. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you feel completely overwhelmed and your breathing gets heavy, your heart begins to race, and you just want to run away as fast as you can? I know I have. This is anxiety when it gets out of control.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or a rapid heartbeat. Anxiety is not the same as fear, but they are often used interchangeably. Anxiety is considered a future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a perceived threat. Whereas fear is an appropriate, present-oriented, and short-lived response to a clearly identifiable and specific threat.

In extreme situations people may experience an anxiety attack or more commonly called a panic attack. Symptoms of a panic attack can include fear of impending doom, flashing visions, hyperventilation, heart palpitations, breathlessness, chest pain, sweating, shaking, headache, chills, nausea, stomach pain, and dizziness. The exact reasons for panic attacks are unknown but factors that may play a role are genetics, stress, depression, mental health conditions such as PTSD or OCD, drug or alcohol abuse, phobias, lack of sleep, or past trauma. In some cases, anxiety can be linked to underlying health problems and maybe the first sign for conditions like heart disease, diabetes, thyroid problems, respiratory disorders, irritable bowel syndrome, and tumors.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR?

- You feel like you're worrying too much and its interfering with your work, relationships, or other parts of your life.
- Your fear, worry, or anxiety is upsetting to you and difficult to control.
- You feel depressed, have trouble with alcohol or drug use, or have other mental health concerns along with anxiety.
- You think your anxiety could be linked to a physical health problem.
- You have suicidal thoughts or behaviors- if this is the case seek emergency treatment immediately.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
pttc.edu/mental-health-and-wellness

PREVENTION

There's no way to predict what will cause someone to develop an anxiety disorder or panic attack, but there are steps you can take to reduce the impact of the symptoms you maybe having.

- **GET HELP EARLY**

Anxiety, like many other mental health conditions, can be harder to treat if you wait. See your doctor to check for underlying conditions or seek the help of a licensed therapist.

- **STAY ACTIVE**

Participate in activities that you enjoy and that make you feel good about yourself. Enjoy social interaction and caring relationships, which can lessen your worries.

- **AVOID ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE**

Alcohol and drug use can cause or worsen anxiety. If you're addicted to any of these substances, quitting can make you anxious. If you can't quit on your own, see your doctor or find a support group to help you.

- **REGULAR EXERCISE**

Exercise burns away stress hormones that can create anxiety symptoms. Exercise also releases endorphins in your brain which can improve overall mood. Exercise will also tire your muscles and body which releases tension and aids in relaxation.

- **LISTEN TO GOOD MUSIC**

Music can have a powerful effect on your mood and on anxiety. The key, however, is to not just choose songs you like, but also make sure that you are listening to music that represents the way you want to feel. Happy or relaxing music can directly impact your mood and the way you feel. Angry or sad music will just intensify those feelings.

- **STOP AND BREATHE**

Breathing exercises are an effective tool in regaining control and can be done anywhere.

Breathe in slowly and gently through your nose for 5-7 seconds, hold for about 3-4 seconds, and then breathe out slowly through your lips for 7-9 seconds. This will help slow your heart rate and restore a balance of CO2 levels in your body.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Top-ranked Hospital in the Nation – Mayo Clinic
- 10 Ways to Stop and Calm Anxiety Quickly (calmclinic.com)
- Healthline: Medical information and health advice you can trust

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If you see this 393 Peer Supporter hard hat sticker it means the individual has received training and is a safe person to confide in.

