

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Proposed publication date: Feb. 17, 2020

Content provided by: Alberta Health Services, myhealth.alberta.ca

How to recognize and deal with anxiety

Feeling worried or nervous is a normal part of everyday life. Everyone frets or feels anxious from time to time. Mild to moderate anxiety can help you focus your attention, energy, and motivation.

If anxiety is severe, you may have feelings of helplessness, confusion, and extreme worry that are out of proportion with the actual seriousness or likelihood of the feared event. Anxiety affects the part of the brain that helps control how you communicate. This makes it harder to express yourself creatively or function effectively in relationships.

Overwhelming anxiety that interferes with daily life is not normal. This type of anxiety may be a symptom of generalized anxiety disorder, or it may be a symptom of another problem, such as depression.

Physical symptoms of anxiety include:

- Trembling, twitching, or shaking.
- Feeling of fullness in the throat or chest.
- Breathlessness or rapid heartbeat.
- Light-headedness or dizziness.
- Sweating or cold, clammy hands.
- Feeling jumpy.

- Muscle tension, aches, or soreness.
- Extreme tiredness.
- Sleep problems, such as the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep, early waking, or restlessness (not feeling rested when you wake up).

Emotional symptoms of anxiety include:

- Restlessness, irritability, or feeling on edge or keyed up.
- Worrying too much.
- Fearing that something bad is going to happen; feeling doomed.
- Inability to concentrate; feeling like your mind goes blank.

You can help prevent anxiety attacks:

- Avoid caffeine, especially in coffees, teas, colas, energy drinks, and chocolate.
- Do not smoke or use smokeless (spit) tobacco products. Nicotine stimulates many physical and psychological processes, causes your blood vessels to constrict, and makes your heart work harder.
- Exercise during the day. Even a brisk walk around the block may help you stay calm.
- Talk with your doctor about your symptoms of anxiety or panic. A licensed counsellor or other health professional can help you find ways to reduce your symptoms with techniques such as biofeedback, hypnosis, or cognitive-behavioural therapy.