

Help with anxiety

Everyone experiences some anxiety. It is part of being alive. Anxiety rouses you to action. It gears you up to face a challenging situation. It keeps you sharp when you're making a speech or presentation. In general, it helps you cope.

But if you have an anxiety disorder, this helpful emotion seems to be too active, getting in the way of your life and disrupting your daily life.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, each with their own distinct features.

Anxiety disorders are the most common of all the mental health disorders. Included in this classification are: Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Agoraphobia, Social Phobia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Specific Phobia, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Acute Stress Disorder. Anxiety disorders in Canada and the United States take a large toll in terms of direct and indirect healthcare costs and personal and interpersonal distress.

Today much more is known about the causes and treatment of anxiety disorders. We know that there are biological and psychological components to every anxiety disorder and that the best form of treatment is counselling or psychotherapy. In more severe cases, medication is used in combination with psychotherapy. Contrary to the popular misconceptions about anxiety disorders today, it is not a purely biochemical or medical disorder.

There are as many potential causes of anxiety disorders as there are people who suffer from them. Family history and genetics play a part in the greater likelihood of someone getting an anxiety disorder in their lifetime. Increased stress and inadequate coping mechanisms to deal with stress and change also contributes to anxiety. Anxiety symptoms can result from such a variety of factors including having had a traumatic experience, having to face major decisions in a one's life, or having developed a more fearful perspective on life.

Anxiety disorders are treatable! They are generally very responsive to counselling or psychotherapy. Treatment is normally short-term. There are also changes in habit and lifestyle that can bring positive change regarding anxiety. Some of these are outlined below.

1) Admit that anxiety is there.

Acknowledge your anxious feelings. Share how you're feeling with a trustworthy friend, partner, or relative. Talk to your doctor. Admitting anxiety is an important step toward feeling better. Facing the truth can be very empowering because once you name the problem you can go about solving it. You open the door to learning how to feel better.

2) Learn Strategies to Deal with Anxiety Symptoms.

Educate yourself by learning strategies to immediately deal with anxiety symptoms. Simple self-talk and behavioral strategies can make a positive difference 'in the heat of the moment'.

3) Use "Active" Language.

Mind-body research shows that the words you use can have a powerful effect on how you feel and your body physiology. Most anxiety sufferers use negative words that undermine

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their emotional and physiological well-being. These are "passive" words. A few passive words include: can't, always, never, and should. Passive words perpetuate your anxiety and fear. They create and strengthen a negative belief that there is nothing you can do about a particular circumstance. That results in anxious thoughts and physical symptoms. You can learn to defeat anxiety by replacing passive words with "active" language. Active language means using words that promote your feelings of self-worth, action and personal power.

When you use power language, the statement: "I can't control my anxiety" becomes "I can control my anxiety, and I'm learning skills to conquer it." The statement: "Why do I always feel so anxious?" becomes "I often feel anxious, but not all of the time." The statement: "I shouldn't be late for dinner" becomes "I may be late for dinner. It's unfortunate, but it's OK."

4) Learn and Use the Relaxation Response.*

This is a tried and true technique for lowering your stress and anxiety level. With a small amount of practice (3 times a week for three weeks) you can significantly 'undo' the stress response.

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep all muscles relaxed.
4. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word, "one" silently to yourself. For example, breathe in...out, "one," in...out, "one," etc. Breathe easily and naturally. You might also say the words "calm" or "let go" as you exhale.
5. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. As you feel yourself relax, you could try to visualize your favorite place -- a beach, lake, mountain stream, etc. Try to picture it in detail and recall feelings of peace and contentment while being there. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes open. Do not stand up for a few minutes.
6. Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, try to ignore them by not dwelling upon them and return to repeating "one." With practice, the response should come with little effort. Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours of any meal, since the digestive process seems to interfere with the elicitation of the relaxation response.

* Benson Herbert with Klipper, Mirian F., *The Relaxation Response*, New York: Avon Books, 1995.

5) Set Small, Achievable Goals.

People with anxiety tend to set unrealistically high expectations for themselves. To counteract this tendency, be sure to set reasonable goals. This builds your confidence and your sense of accomplishment.

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When you are learning skills to handle stress and reduce your anxiety, small steps work best. Setting small, achievable goals will help you take you farther than you can imagine over time. It will help you reach your final destination: a happier, low-anxiety life.

6) Realize that Now is the Perfect Time to Start Feeling Better.

And finally, realize that your anxiety and fear will not go away until you stop waiting and start learning. There are many resources available to you to help you overcome your anxiety — books, doctors, counsellors. Now is the time to conquer your anxiety. You may be saying to yourself... "I can't tackle my anxiety right now. I'll wait until my symptoms aren't so strong to make changes in my life." That's passive language (see # 3 above!) Move now to take back your life! If you wait for something else to happen to improve your life, you're giving away your power to choose and be in control of your life. That adds to anxiety and feelings of loss of control.

Now is the perfect time to take on anxiety. Don't wait. All you need to do is take the first step.

Ready to talk? Russell Counselling can help you move ahead with your goals for growth and healing. Call us toll free at 1 866 433 5666 for a free brief consultation or counsellor@russellcounselling.com.

The resources on this site are provided for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace the specialized training and professional judgment of a health care or mental health care professional.

Russell Counselling cannot be held responsible for the use of the information provided. Please always consult a trained mental health professional before making any decision regarding treatment of yourself or others.

Self-help information and information from the Internet is useful, but it is not a substitute for professional assistance. Please seek professional help:

- *if you have thoughts of killing (or otherwise harming) yourself or others;*
- *if you are gravely disabled (unable to care for yourself);*
- *if you are abusing substances;*
- *or if you or someone else is in any danger of harm.*

If you are in need of help, please contact a Crisis Clinic or a qualified mental health care provider.