

# Geriatric Anxiety: A Guide for Patients & Families

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Geriatric anxiety refers to anxiety disorders that occur in older adults. Anxiety can affect mood, sleep, concentration, physical comfort, and overall quality of life. While occasional worry is normal, persistent anxiety that interferes with daily activities may require treatment. Anxiety in older adults is common and often treatable with therapy, medications, and supportive care.

## Signs & Symptoms to Watch For

### Common Cognitive Symptoms

- Excessive worry or constant rumination
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- Feeling mentally overwhelmed or unable to relax
- Trouble making decisions
- Increased sensitivity to stress

### Behavioral & Emotional Changes

- Persistent nervousness or feeling on edge
- Fear of illness, injury, or loss of independence
- Irritability or restlessness
- Avoiding activities, appointments, or social situations
- Increased dependence on reassurance from others

### Physical Symptoms

- Muscle tension or body aches
- Trouble sleeping or frequent nighttime waking
- Rapid heartbeat or palpitations
- Shortness of breath or feeling shaky
- Stomach upset or digestive discomfort

## Typical Presentation & Progression

### Early Stage

- Increased worry about health, safety, or finances
- Mild sleep disturbances
- Feeling tense or restless more frequently
- Occasional difficulty concentrating

### Middle Stage

- Persistent worry that interferes with daily life
- Avoidance of activities or social situations
- Difficulty sleeping and increased fatigue
- Increased physical symptoms such as muscle tension or headaches

### Late Stage

- Severe anxiety that significantly limits daily functioning
- Panic attacks or intense episodes of fear
- Social withdrawal or inability to leave home in severe cases
- Increased risk of depression or reduced quality of life

## Medications Commonly Used to Treat Anxiety

First-Line FDA-Approved Options	Second-Line / Adjunct FDA-Approved Options
<b>SSRI</b>	<b>Azapirone</b>
Escitalopram (Lexapro®)	Buspirone (BuSpar®)
Fluoxetine (Prozac®)	
Fluvoxamine CR (Luvox CR®)	<b>Antihistamine</b>
Paroxetine (Paxil®)	Hydroxyzine (Vistaril®)
Sertraline (Zoloft®)	
	<b>Benzodiazepines (Short Term)</b>
<b>SNRI</b>	Alprazolam (Xanax®)
Duloxetine (Cymbalta®)	Clonazepam (Klonopin®)
Venlafaxine XR (Effexor XR®)	Lorazepam (Ativan®)
	Diazepam (Valium®)
	Chlordiazepoxide (Librium®)
	Clorazepate (Tranxene®)

### Other Treatment Options

- Psychotherapy, especially cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Relaxation techniques and stress management
- Regular exercise and structured routines
- Mindfulness, breathing exercises, and supportive counseling
- In some cases, short-term medications may be used to help severe symptoms

### Diagnostic Tests Your Healthcare Team May Use

#### Clinical Evaluation

- Detailed review of symptoms, stressors, and medical history
- Anxiety screening questionnaires such as the GAD-7
- Review of medications that may contribute to anxiety symptoms

#### Laboratory Tests

- Blood tests to rule out medical causes such as thyroid problems or vitamin deficiencies
- Evaluation for medication side effects or interactions

#### Imaging Studies

- Brain imaging such as MRI or CT may be used if symptoms suggest another neurological condition such as stroke or dementia.

## Planning for the Future

### Healthcare Planning

- Establish regular follow-up with healthcare providers
- Develop healthy daily routines and coping strategies
- Encourage physical activity, social interaction, and structured activities

### Legal & Financial Planning

- Maintain updated healthcare directives and power of attorney documents
- Review insurance coverage for mental health treatment
- Plan for supportive services if anxiety significantly affects daily life

### Support for Caregivers

- Provide reassurance and emotional support
- Encourage participation in activities and social engagement
- Seek caregiver support or counseling if needed

### National Organizations & Resources

✓ National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

☎ 301-443-4513 | 🌐 [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov)

✓ Anxiety & Depression Association of America

☎ 240-485-1001 | 🌐 [adaa.org](https://www.adaa.org)

✓ National Institute on Aging (NIA)

☎ 800-438-4380 | 🌐 [nia.nih.gov](https://www.nia.nih.gov)

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 [eldercare.acl.gov](https://www.eldercare.acl.gov)

### Final Notes

- Anxiety in older adults is common and treatable.
- Early recognition and treatment can significantly improve comfort and quality of life.
- Support from family, healthcare providers, and community resources can make a meaningful difference.