



Recognize and reduce anxiety



Anxiety disorders are on the rise¹, with more than one in three adults reporting symptoms². Whether you've experienced anxiety before or it's newly developed, you can combat anxiety by recognizing and reducing the symptoms.

Reduce your anxiety

Once you've recognized your symptoms, you can take action in managing your anxiety. Here are several ways you can reduce your anxiety:



Breathe, be mindful and stay calm: Take a deep breath and accept that you're anxious. Use visualization or meditation to stay calm.



Fact check your thoughts: Pay attention to your thought patterns. Don't fixate on worst-case scenarios, and try to rationalize your fears. Redirect or put a positive spin on negative or unproductive thoughts.



Stay in your time zone: Anxiety is often a future-oriented state of mind. Stay present and try the 3-3-3 rule: name three things you see, three sounds you hear, and move three parts of your body. This mental trick can help center your body.



Redirect and get active: Creative outlets such as playing an instrument or crafting can help redirect your focus, just as staying physically active can. When you are physically active, your body releases endorphins, which are chemicals that act as natural painkillers. Just five minutes of aerobic exercise can also spark anti-anxiety effects.



Talk it out: Talk to a friend or family member. Sharing your feelings can also help to rationalize any fears. When you let others in, you cultivate hope and improve your sense of well-being.

Recognize when you're anxious

When you experience anxiety, your body knows it. Take time to recognize the signs your body gives you when you're feeling anxious:

- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Skipping meals or overeating
- Feeling worried/difficulty concentrating
- Headache
- Stomachache
- Avoiding social situations
- Feeling panicked

Resources

¹<https://www.totalbrain.com/mentalhealthindex/>

² <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

For additional suggestions and information on how to manage anxiety, check out these resources:

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America provides anxiety management: <https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/managing-anxiety/exercise-stress-and-anxiety>

Empower Work provides free confidential counseling through text messaging: <https://www.empowerwork.org/>



Overcoming depression



Shifts in work environments, social distancing requirements, compromised health conditions, unprecedented world events and more have created an unfortunate concoction for a rise in mental health issues. Along with mental health issues, loneliness and isolation are the greatest contributors for those with moderate to severe depression.^{5&6}

Depression can affect how you feel, think, and cope with everyday life, yet it can be difficult to recognize. Symptoms vary greatly from person to person, and tend to develop gradually.

While it is normal to experience negative emotions from time to time, it is crucial to identify if your emotions may be actual signs of depression.

Manage your depression symptoms

We encourage you to reach out to your medical provider to obtain personalized support and identify ideal methods for recovery. You can also try out these best practices to manage your depression symptoms:



Practice self-care: Self-care comes in many forms - physical, mental and social. Identifying ways to nurture each of these components is crucial. Examples include exercise, healthy eating, engaging in hobbies, meditating, or spending time with close family and friends, even virtually.



Lessen the load: The average adult makes about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day.³ When you're depressed, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Delegate or reprioritize items on your plate to help alleviate stress and fatigue.



Create a calm and peaceful living space: When at home, you should feel a sense of calm. A safe space where you feel happy and relaxed can lighten your mood and help you feel at ease.



Cut out or limit social media: Studies have linked the use of social media to depression, anxiety, poor sleep quality, lower self-esteem, inattention, and hyperactivity.⁴ Although it may feel like social media brings us closer to the people we love, it can also facilitate a culture of subconscious comparison and addiction to technology. It's important to recognize the influence and set defined boundaries for social media usage.

For additional more information and support in with managing depression, check out these resources:

[The Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) provides additional information and depression treatment resources.

[Empower Work](#) provides free confidential counseling through text messaging.

[The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) provides 24/7 free, confidential support to those in crisis.

Identifying signs of depression

Have you experienced any of these symptoms continually for more than two weeks?² Here are a few common indications of depression:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Physical pains/aches that do not have a clear cause and/or do not ease even with treatment
- Thoughts of death or suicide

¹ Depression Center: Symptoms, Causes, Medications, and Therapies. Retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/depression/default.htm>

² Depression. Retrieved from <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>

³ How Many Daily Decisions Do We Make? Retrieved from <http://science.unctv.org/content/reportersblog/choices>

⁴ The FOMO Is Real: How Social Media Increases Depression and Loneliness. Retrieved from <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/social-media-use-increases-depression-and-loneliness>

⁵ American Health Counselors Association. (2020). Beyond a Perfect Storm: How Racism, COVID-19, and Economic Meltdown Imperil Our Mental Health [Brochure]. Alexandria, VA

⁶ <https://www.mhanational.org/more-169000-people-screen-positive-depression-or-anxiety-start-pandemic>



Powering through to build a stronger you



During difficult and stressful times, you may feel even more inclined to look for outlets to relieve stress or reduce your anxiety. And while unwinding with a cocktail or two with colleagues may sound like a good idea, it's important to understand the difference between a harmless virtual happy hour and an evolving substance use disorder.

Anytime we feel a loss of control over some aspect of our lives, it exacerbates the struggle to maintain a happy outlook. We may end up using negative coping methods such as alcohol and drug use when trying to relieve stress, anxiety and depression.

Prepare for substance use recovery and prevention

Try out these healthy habits to support you on your journey to recovery:



Maintain a treatment plan: Every person is unique in their personal battle with substance use or addiction. Therefore, a personalized treatment plan outlined by a health professional provides the best chance for long-term recovery. Try your best to stay on track with a treatment plan and consult your provider with any concerns.



Avoid high-risk situations: Most relapses are brought on because of the environmental opportunity. They occur when the substance is readily available, others are partaking, or when a person feels they won't get caught. A strong treatment plan should include strategies for avoiding these high-risk situations.



Seek support if you start using again: Often, when facing a relapse, the sinking feeling of guilt makes the decision to recover even harder. The event of a relapse does not infer a character flaw or morality issue; it's a setback you can overcome. If you or someone you love finds themselves in the event of a relapse, seek help immediately.

Recognize when you're struggling with substance use

Common substance use symptoms or behaviors include, but are not limited to:

- Feeling that you have to use the substance regularly — daily or even several times per day
- Having intense urges for the substance that blocks out any other thoughts
- Over time, requiring a larger dose of the substance to feel the same effect
- Making certain that you maintain a supply
- Spending money on the substance, even if you can't afford it
- Not meeting obligations, work responsibilities, or attending social gatherings due to substance use
- Failing in your attempts to stop using the substance

For additional more information and support with substance use, check out the free, confidential, 24/7 treatment referral and information services from the Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>



Invest in your rest



Strategies to manage stress during the day often aren't as helpful when it's time for bed, especially since intrusive thoughts can make it challenging to fall and stay asleep.

According to Stanford Medicine, the two main contributors to potential deteriorating sleep conditions are changes in stress levels and changes in sleep behaviors.

Without education and professional guidance, sleep disorders can directly affect the way we feel, look and function, since interrupted or unfulfilled sleep prevents adequate muscle repair, memory consolidation and appetite/growth regulation¹.

Six tips to maximize sleep quality



Stay consistent: Go to bed and wake up at similar times each day and night. Your body will start to acclimate to your circadian rhythm (body clock).



Say no to caffeine and alcohol: Caffeine and alcohol both can prohibit falling asleep when consumed in the afternoon or evening.



Break a sweat: Exercise increases body temperature, and the post-exercise decrease promotes falling asleep. It may also reduce insomnia by decreasing arousal, anxiety and depressive symptoms. Don't exercise too late in the day.³



Keep your room cool and dark: Your brain and body prefer a dark, cool environment. A temperature range of 60 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit stimulates melatonin production, which encourages sleep.⁴



Dump the distractions: Noises, bright lights, and electronics in the bedroom are a recipe for disaster at bedtime. Dedicate your room to quiet time without technology and distractions.



Try meditating before bed: Whether you practice on your own or use a guided mobile app, meditation helps create healthy sleep patterns.⁵

Do you identify with any of these sleep disorders?

Although there are more than 80 different types of sleep disorders, the following list outlines the most common and major conditions.²

- **Insomnia:** When you're unable to fall asleep and stay asleep. This is the most common type of sleep disorder.
- **Sleep apnea:** A breathing disorder that causes you to stop breathing for 10 sec. or more during sleep.
- **Hypersomnia:** If you are unable to stay awake during the day. This includes narcolepsy, which causes extreme daytime sleepiness.
- **Circadian rhythm disorders:** Problems with the sleep-wake cycle, leading to an inability to sleep and wake at the right times.
- **Parasomnia:** Acting in unusual ways while falling asleep, sleeping, or waking from sleep, such as walking, talking, or eating.
- **Restless legs syndrome (RLS):** A tingling or prickly sensation in your legs, along with a powerful urge to move them.

For additional suggestions and information on how to improve your sleep, check out the National Sleep Foundation: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/>



Manage stress to feel your best



Whether your stressors come from work, home, family or your social life, it's challenging to manage everything that life throws at you.

Chronic stress negatively affects your overall health and results in lasting effects. In fact, stress can lead to serious mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, as well as heart disease, high blood pressure and more.

Reduce your stress

Taking action when you're stressed is the best thing you can do to help yourself. Test a couple of these techniques to determine what works best for you:



Don't jump to conclusions: It's normal to stress and worry about the future, but sometimes we find ourselves focused on the "what ifs." Set the worry aside, talk it out or write it down, engage in some self-care and stay in the present.



Get moving: Whether you take a walk or run a 5K, exercise releases feel-good chemicals in your brain (endorphins) that help reduce stress.



Be mindful: Meditation and deep breathing are effective techniques to make you more resilient to stress and slow your heart rate.



Disconnect: Take a break from technology. Consider trying something new after work to take you away from your devices such as arts and crafts, playing a new sport or volunteering.

Recognize when you're stressed

It can be difficult to identify when you're under stress while you're trying to keep up with your surroundings. A few telltale signs of stress include:

- Change in your appetite
- Low energy
- Increase in colds or other infections
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Hypochondria: Excessive worry about one's health and unwarranted fear that one has a serious disease or virus

For additional suggestions and stress relief ideas, check out these resources:

HelpGuide shows you how to improve your mental health and wellness:

<http://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/stress.htm>

Empower Work provides free confidential counseling through text messaging: <https://www.empowerwork.org/>