

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the most common mental illness. Approximately 1 in every 10 people will experience an anxiety disorder. All of us feel stressed, worried or anxious when we are dealing with work demands or writing a test but individuals who have an anxiety disorder experience an extreme amount of fear and worry that is out of proportion to the situation and sometimes for no obvious reason.

Some of the more common types of anxiety disorders are:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Social Phobia (Social Anxiety Disorder)
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Although many of the signs and symptoms of anxiety are similar some vary according to the specific disorder.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

People with Generalized Anxiety Disorder experience ongoing anxiety, tension and excessive worry about everyday events. These individuals often expect the “worst case scenario”. They may also experience physical symptoms such as headache, nausea, muscle tension and trembling.

Panic Disorder

People with panic disorder tend to experience sudden and intense panic “attacks”. They often end up in emergency departments because they think they are having a heart attack. Other symptoms include chest pain or tightness, shortness of breath, choking sensations, pounding heart, sweating, hot and cold flushes, nausea and dizziness. Panic attacks are also common with the other anxiety disorders. As a result of the panic attacks people sometimes develop agoraphobia and avoid situations or places where they feel escape might be difficult or embarrassing in case of a panic attack. Often people will not leave their homes unless they have a trusted family member or friend with them.

Social Phobia

People with social phobia have excessive worry about being criticized and fear doing something embarrassing in front of others. They will often avoid situations that make them feel uncomfortable which greatly reduces their ability to lead a normal life.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

People with OCD suffer from persistent unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and behaviours (compulsions) which they find extremely difficult to control. Common themes of OCD are worry about contamination, counting, organizing or experiencing disturbing religious or sexual thoughts.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

People who experience PTSD have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event in which they felt that their life was threatened. These individuals may be survivors of rape or war or even a car accident. Common symptoms include nightmares, flashbacks of the experience, depression and irritability.

Will I Get Better?

Anxiety is a highly treatable illness. It is often treated with a combination of medication and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Anti-depressant medications are usually effective for treating anxiety. CBT helps people to recognize and change their negative thinking. CBT can also help people understand what situations trigger their anxiety and find behaviours that help overcome the anxiety. There are some good books and websites that use a cognitive behavioural therapy approach. Your family physician may also be able to refer you for individual or group counselling.

Is There Anything I Can Do to Help Myself?

There are many things you can do to help yourself.

- Take your medication as prescribed. Antidepressants can take at least 2 weeks before you notice any improvements. Most side effects will go away after about a week but tell your doctor if you are having troublesome side effects and do not stop your medication abruptly.
- Physical exercise has proven very helpful in reducing anxiety and stress. Exercising for a minimum of 20 minutes at a time is recommended.
- Limit your caffeine use. Caffeine is a stimulant and will only increase your anxious symptoms.
- Daily breathing exercises. Breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of 3 then breathe out through your mouth to a count of 3. 10 minutes twice a day can be effective in dealing with anxiety.
- Alcohol and/or street drugs may seem like a good way to help you relax but will only create more problems in the long run.
- Remind yourself to stay focused on the present rather than worrying about what might happen in the future.

Help for Anxiety

Phone Help

<i>The Support Network (24 hr distress/suicide line)</i>	482 HELP (482 4357)
<i>Capital Health Link</i>	408 LINK (408 5465)
<i>Community Service Referral Line</i>	211

Websites

<i>The Canadian Mental Health Association</i>	www.cmha.ca
<i>Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada</i>	www.anxietycanada.ca
<i>Canadian Network for Mood and Anxiety</i>	www.canmat.org

Books

<i>The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook (2005)</i>	Bourne, E.J.
<i>The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook (2000)</i>	
.....	Davis, M., Eshelman, E.R. & McKay, M.

References: *The Canadian Mental Health Association The National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov)*

What is Depression?

Depression is a common medical illness often referred to as Major Depressive Disorder. 8 to 10% of adults in Canada will experience an episode of depression in their life time. Depression is not just about feeling sad. Individuals who have a major depressive disorder have symptoms that interfere with the way that they think, feel and act. Some of the symptoms of depression include:

- Overwhelming feelings of sadness or grief
- Poor sleep or excessive sleep
- Poor concentration or memory
- Feeling worthless, helpless or hopeless
- Eating more or less than usual
- Feeling slowed down or agitated
- Feeling unreasonably guilty
- Loss of energy, feeling tired
- Tearfulness
- Having thoughts of death or suicide
- Decreased sex drive
- Avoiding other people

What Causes Depression?

The causes of depression are not fully understood. It is often related to:

- A chemical imbalance in the brain
- A family history of depression
- Relationship problems
- A loss such as a death or loss of a job
- Pregnancy/childbirth
- Seasonal changes

Will I Get Better?

Depression is a very treatable illness. Depression can be treated by counselling and/or medications. Often a combination of counselling and medication is most effective. Your family doctor can help you decide the best type of treatment for you or your doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist for further assessment and treatment. Depression sometimes goes away without treatment but it can last for several weeks or months. Treatment will help the depression end more quickly.



Is There Anything I Can Do To Help Myself?

There are many things that you can do to help yourself. People who have depression often feel exhausted, worthless, hopeless and helpless. These negative thoughts and feelings are symptoms of the illness and do not usually reflect the real circumstances. Things that you can do to overcome the negativity include:

- Work with your doctor. A trusting and honest relationship with your family physician is very important.
- Take your medication as prescribed. Antidepressant medication can take at least 2 weeks before you notice any changes. Most side effects will go away after about a week but tell your doctor about your side effects and do not stop your medication abruptly.
- Set small attainable goals for yourself.
- Be patient with yourself. You did not get sick overnight and it will take some time to get better.
- Let your family and friends help you. Be around people who care about you.
- Take part in activities that you enjoy when you're well such as going to a movie or reading.
- Eat healthy. Even if you don't feel hungry your body needs energy to heal.
- Get physical. Regular exercise can reduce symptoms of depression. Talk to your doctor first if you haven't exercised in a long time.
- Limit or avoid alcohol and non prescriptions drugs. Alcohol and many street drugs worsen the symptoms of depression and may also interfere with your prescribed medication.
- Limit your caffeine consumption. It can make you feel anxious and irritable and make it more difficult to sleep.

If you are having thoughts of suicide tell your doctor and don't be afraid to use the 24 Hour Distress Line or go to a hospital.

Help for Depression

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Websites

<i>The Canadian Mental Health Association</i>	www.cmha.ca
<i>Mood Disorders Society of Canada</i>	www.mooddorderscanada.ca
<i>Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions The Anti-depressant Skills Workbook</i>	www.carma.ca/publications

Books

<i>Feeling Good (1992) or The Feeling Good Handbook (1999)</i>	Burns, David
<i>Your Depression Map: Find the Source of Your Depression and Chart Your Own Recovery (2002)</i>	Paterson, Randy
<i>Mind Over Mood (1995)</i>	Greenberger, Dennis and Padesky, Christine

References: *The Canadian Mental Health Association Mood Disorders Society of Canada*

How do I start?

Although there are many free or low cost options for mental health or psychological counselling the wait time for an appointment may be long. Some individuals have benefits plans or employee assistance plans (EAP) through their employer that allow them to access mental health or psychological counselling for themselves and family members through a private therapist. Individuals with non insured health benefits i.e. Indian Affairs can also access private therapists.

Although most private therapists are psychologists, social workers and registered psychiatric nurses also offer private psychotherapy and counseling.

Choosing a therapist can be a daunting task. The Psychologists Association of Alberta offers a referral service which can be accessed by telephone or their website. This can be helpful if you are looking for a psychologist who is located in a certain area, speaks a specific language or specializes in particular problems such as eating disorders or working with children. Using a referral service however, does not guarantee that you will find a therapist that works well with you. One of the most important factors in choosing a therapist is to find someone that you feel comfortable with.

Before scheduling an appointment with a therapist you should contact two or three to get a feel for whether their personality and counselling style is a good fit for you.

The Psychologists Association of Alberta Referral Service 428-Talk (8255) www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca

The therapists listed below have offices in north Edmonton and therefore may be easier for you to access. This does not mean that the Edmonton North PCN would recommend these individuals over others. The choice of a therapist is extremely personal and you should feel free to explore all of your options.

Monica Sliwa	16729 100 Street NW	780 937 9730
Marion Eals	6304 129 Avenue.....	780 919 4524
Joy Muller	12911 97 Street.....	780 433 2225

Questions to ask a potential Therapist

- Are you registered with a professional college under the Alberta Health Professions Act?

This ensures that the therapist has met the educational requirements and maintains the required level of competency. Professional colleges include the College of Alberta Psychologists, Alberta College of Social Workers and College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta.

- What is your experience working with clients with depression, marital problems, addictions etc...?

You want to ensure that the therapist is experienced in working with people with situations similar to what you are experiencing.

- What kind of psychotherapeutic approach do you use and how does it work?

There are many different types and methods of psychotherapy. Two types of psychotherapy which have been well researched and proven

to be more effective are cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy helps people to understand the role of thinking in how we feel and what we do. When people are able to identify and challenge inaccurate thoughts or perceptions that they have of themselves and the world around them their feelings tend to become more rational or positive.

Interpersonal Therapy focuses on the behaviours and social interactions that an individual has with family and friends. The main goal of therapy is to improve communication skills and increase self esteem.

- What are your fees?

Private therapists typically charge between \$100.00 and \$160.00 per session. A session lasts between 50 and 60 minutes. Before committing to a session with a therapist ensure that they are listed as providers with your specific insurance or EAP plan. Some therapists will also offer a sliding fee scale if the individual is paying for their own therapy and has financial limitations.

- What is your cancellation policy?

Many therapists will charge for a missed appointment or late cancellation. Keep this in mind before committing to an appointment.

- What is your availability?

You may prefer a therapist that offers evening or weekend appointments. If transportation is a problem you may want to find a therapist closer to where you live or work or that is accessible by public transportation.

Questions to ask yourself when considering Psychotherapy

- In my telephone conversation with this therapist how do I feel?

The need to feel comfortable with your therapist cannot be stressed enough. Ask yourself...do I feel at ease with this person? Does this person feel like a good fit for me? Do I get a sense that he/she understands what I am experiencing?

- Am I prepared for psychotherapy?

It is hard work to acknowledge and change feelings, thoughts and behaviours. You must be ready to commit yourself to consistently attending your appointments and following through with homework that your therapist may assign.

- Are my expectations for psychotherapy realistic?

Psychotherapy cannot change what happened to you in the past but can help you better understand how it affects you. It is also very important to understand that psychotherapy will not change the behavior of other people in your life.