

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness. About one in every four Canadians will experience at least one anxiety disorder in their lifetime. All of us feel stressed, worried or anxious when we are dealing with situations like work demands or writing a test. People who have an anxiety disorder experience a great deal of fear and worry that is too much for the situation and sometimes for no obvious reason.

Symptoms range depending on the type of anxiety disorder but general symptoms can include:

- Feelings of fear, panic and uneasiness
- Problems sleeping
- Cold or sweaty hands or feet
- An inability to be still and calm
- Excessive and unrealistic worry and tension
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Dry mouth
- Numbness or tingling in hands and feet
- Nausea
- Muscle tension

- Dizziness
- Overwhelming fear of being judged and self-consciousness in social situations

Will I Get Better?

Anxiety disorders are a highly treatable and manageable illness. It is often treated with a combination of medication and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Anti-depressant medications may also be effective for treating anxiety disorders. CBT helps people to recognize and replace their unhelpful thinking with more realistic thinking. CBT can also help people understand what can trigger their anxiety and find ways to help overcome it. There are some good books and websites that use a CBT 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. Medications can take at least two weeks before you notice them

working. Most side effects will go away after about a week but tell your doctor if you are having any side effects. Do not stop your medication without talking to your doctor.

- Physical activity has proven to be very helpful in reducing anxiety.
- Limit your caffeine use. Caffeine will only increase your anxious feelings.
- Try daily breathing exercises. Breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of three then breathe out through your mouth to a count of three. Doing this for 10 minutes, twice a day can help to calm you.
- Limit alcohol use and avoid non-prescription drugs as using these can create problems in the long run.
- Remind yourself to stay focused on the present rather than worrying about what might happen in the future or thinking too much about the past.

Resources...

Below are some additional resources you may find helpful:

Canadian Mental Health Association: Edmonton » <http://edmonton.cmha.ca/>

Public Health Agency of Canada » www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php

Mood Disorders Society of Canada » www.mooddorderscanada.ca/

If you are having thoughts of suicide, tell your doctor and don't be afraid to use the 24 Hour Distress line, 780-482-HELP (4357), attend the Walk-In Counseling Society 9562-82 Ave., 780-757-0900, or go to the hospital.