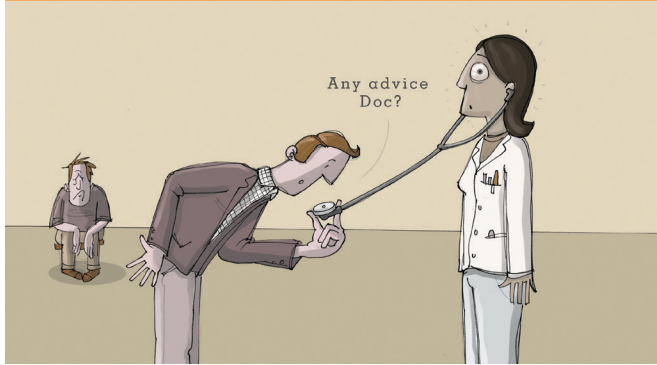


Seeking help for anxiety



What this fact sheet covers:

- Why seek help for anxiety?
- Who to talk to
- Treatment available

It's important to get treatment for anxiety

Anxiety is physically and emotionally exhausting. Getting help early means you can start to get relief and recover sooner. There are many professionals who treat all kinds of anxiety.

There is a wide range of effective treatments for anxiety, from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and e-mental health tools to relaxation techniques and medications. There are also lots of things you can do to help yourself.

Often it's a combination of things that help us get better, such as:

- a well-informed health professional you feel comfortable talking to
- the right psychological and medical therapies
- support from family and friends
- exercising and healthy eating
- learning ways to manage challenges and stress, such as structured problem solving, meditation and yoga.

How do I know it's anxiety?

Severe anxiety can appear in ways that feel like other health issues, e.g. chest pain, a racing heartbeat, dizziness and even rashes. Sometimes anxious people think they're having a heart attack.

When we're anxious, we can also become hyper-aware of our body and aches and pains, perceived threats and danger. Sometimes, once we're aware of a problem, we can become 'hyper-vigilant' in checking on all the niggles and pains we feel. This can spiral into feeling more concern and worry, making the anxiety more severe.

You should always see a doctor, so they can make a thorough check of your symptoms and rule out any other medical condition.

Who can provide help for anxiety?

As well as your GP, there are other health professionals who can help with anxiety, including:

- psychologists
- psychiatrists
- counsellors
- school counsellors
- social workers and occupational therapists trained in mental health
- mental health nurses
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers trained in mental health.

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What type of treatment is available?

There are three broad categories of treatment for anxiety:

- psychological treatments (talking therapies)
- physical treatments (medications)
- self-help and alternative therapies.

Psychological therapies are the most effective way to treat and prevent the recurrence of most types of anxiety. Depending on the type of anxiety, self-help and alternative therapies can also be helpful. They can be used alone or combined with physical and psychological treatments.

A thorough assessment by your doctor is needed to decide on the best combination of treatments for you.

Psychological treatments

Psychological treatments can be one-on-one, group-based or online interactions. Psychological treatments are sometimes called 'talking therapies' as opposed to 'chemical therapies' (i.e. medications).



Talking therapies can help us change habits in the way we think, and cope better with life's challenges. They can help us address the reasons behind our anxiety, and also prevent anxiety from returning.

There are a wide range of psychological treatments for anxiety, including:

- cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)
- exposure therapy (behaviour therapy)
- interpersonal therapy (IPT)
- mindfulness-based cognitive therapy
- positive psychology

- psychotherapies
- counselling
- narrative therapy.

Some of the above treatments can be accessed online. Evidence-based online treatments can be as effective as face-to-face treatments. These online treatments are often referred to as e-mental health programs.

Physical treatments

Your doctor should undertake a thorough health check before deciding whether medication is a good option for you. Taking medication for anxiety must be supervised by a doctor. If medication is prescribed as part of your treatment, your doctor should explain the reason for choosing the medication they've prescribed.

Your doctor will:

- discuss the risks and benefits, side effects, and how regularly you need check-ups
- advise what treatments can work together with the medication, such as psychotherapy, lifestyle changes (e.g. exercise) and other support options.

Anti-anxiety medications are used for very severe anxiety in anxiety types such as panic disorder, generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), and social phobia. Anti-anxiety medications, such as benzodiazepines, can:

- be addictive
- become ineffective over time
- have other side effects such as headaches, dizziness and memory loss.

Anti-anxiety medications are not recommended for long-term use.

It's important to know that not all anxiety needs medication. Many people respond well to lifestyle changes and psychological treatments.



Self-help and alternative therapies

There are a wide range of self-help measures and therapies that can be useful for anxiety. It's good to know that there are things you can do for yourself to feel better.

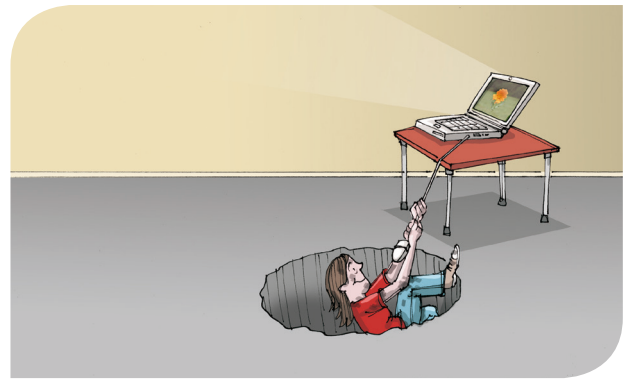
Self-help and complementary therapies that may be useful for anxiety include:

- exercise
- good nutrition
- omega-3
- meditation
- de-arousal strategies
- relaxation and breathing techniques
- yoga
- alcohol and drug avoidance
- acupuncture.

Different types of anxiety respond to different kinds of treatments. Severe anxiety may not respond to self-help and alternative therapies alone. These can be valuable adjuncts to psychological and physical treatments.

e-mental health programs

e-mental health programs can be used in conjunction with a mental health professional or as a stand-alone option. e-mental health programs (also called 'e-therapies' or 'online therapies') are online mental health treatment and support services. You can access them on the internet using your smartphone, tablet or computer. The programs can help people experiencing mild-to-moderate depression or anxiety.



Some e-mental health tools, such as myCompass developed by the Black Dog Institute, have been found to be as effective in treating mild-to-moderate depression as face-to-face therapies. e-mental health treatments are based on face-to-face therapy, positive psychology and behavioural activation. These therapies mainly focus on reframing thoughts and changing behaviour.

Key points to remember

- Lots of professionals can help you with anxiety
- There are many types of treatments for anxiety, and you can get better
- Many people who have had anxiety have been able to seek help and live active, fulfilling lives

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