

Curbing Your Anxiety:

Tips on How to Take Care of Your Mental Health

Anthony Watt, BA(Hon), MEd, RP
Mental Health Clinician, Mount Sinai Hospital Wellness Centre
Geriatric Psychiatry Program, Department of Psychiatry
Mount Sinai Hospital, Sinai Health

Introductions

Tony and Mount Sinai Hospital Wellness Centre



Breathing Exercise



Covered today:

1. What is anxiety? How we experience it?
2. What anxiety looks like in older adults and seniors.
3. How to Curb your Anxiety: STOP
 - COVID and Beyond
4. Questions

What is Anxiety?



- Definition: An anxiety disorder causes feelings of fear, worry, apprehension, or dread that are excessive or disproportional to the problems or situations that are feared.

Anxiety is functional and has a purpose



Anxiety may be Dysfunctional and Inappropriate



Fight or Flight Response

FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

RESULTING SYMPTOMS

Mind and body set on high alert watching out for signs of danger.



Sense of danger, impending doom, Agitation - uneasiness - can't relax

Rapid breathing helps to divert blood to vital organs

Dizziness - Lightheadedness - Hyperventilation

'Tunnel Vision' - Peripheral vision is diminished so that sight is centrally focused (on any danger) Pupils of the eyes widen to let in more light.

Eye strain - Fear of going blind Blurred vision / spots in front of eyes - Sensitivity to light Feelings of unreality

Adrenaline increases heart rate sending blood to major muscle groups - to prepare for action.

Rapid heart beat - Palpitations - Flutters - Feeling of 'skipped' or 'missed' beats. Tight chest - Choking sensation

Increase in sweat so that the body does not overheat.

Sweating (even in cold) Hot and cold flushes

Stomach produces extra acid and digestive juices. Muscle action increases to quickly digest and eliminate food

Frequently needing toilet Nausea 'Butterflies' Churning stomach Acidity Indigestion - Diarrhoea

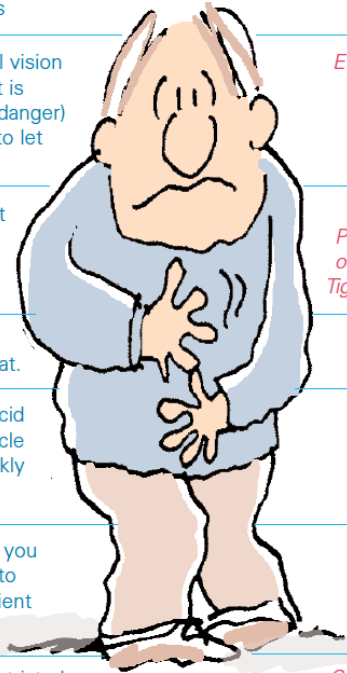
Muscles tense to prepare you for a quick departure and to make the body more resilient to attack.

Muscle tension - Shaking Stiffness Trembling - 'Jelly legs' - Twitching Even severe pain at times.

Blood vessels to skin constricted reducing any potential blood loss especially in hands and feet.



Cold clammy hands - 'Pins and needles' - Tingling sensations or numbness in hands and feet



Symptoms of Anxiety

- Shakiness
- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Digestion problems
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Eye and vision problems
- Muscle tension or soreness
- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Irrational thoughts
- Forgetfulness
- Nightmares
- Scary thoughts
- Irritability
- Avoidance of activities, places, people, and even thoughts that trigger anxiousness
- Changes in weight, appetite, or eating habits
- Sleep disturbances, including sleeping too much or too little
- Resistance to leaving home
- Withdrawal and isolating behavior
- Obsessive thoughts
- Compulsive behavior
- Panic
- Abuse of substances

Anxiety in Older Adults and Seniors

- a common illness among older adults which affects as many as 10-20 percent of the older population, although it is often undiagnosed
- may be linked to several important risk factors. These include, among others: Chronic medical conditions (especially chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD], cardiovascular disease including arrhythmias and angina, thyroid disease, and diabetes)
- **What are some of the reasons you have anxiety now?**
- **What are some reasons older people may have anxiety?**

Causes of Anxiety in Older Adults & Seniors

COVID-19	Isolation	Adjustments	Memory Decline	Health Problems
Power-of-Attorney	Family Relocation	Loss of Independence	Role Reversal	Immobility Falls
End-of-Life Planning	Placed in Long Term Care Facility	Loss of Partner Pets	Dementia (Alzheimer's)	Changes in Sensory Perception
Safety	Abandonment	Financial Insecurity	Confidence	Chronic Pain
Dying Alone	Loss of Social Support	Social Status	Ambiguous Loss	Death

How do you experience anxiety?

Feelings: (Physical, emotional)

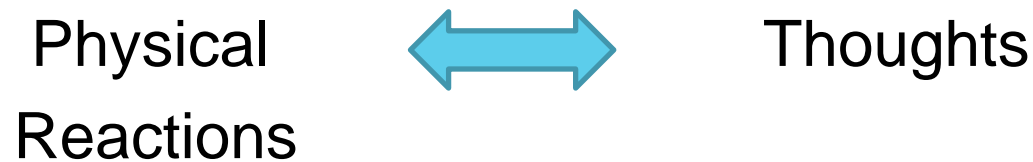
- “Comes in intense crashing tidal waves”
- “Feels like I am having a heart attack!”
- “It’s an undercurrent, always there, just waiting.”
- “There’s this restless, pressured feeling in my chest.”

Thoughts:

- “I just touched the doorknob, I better wash my hands or else I’ll get COVID?”
- “It’s airborne, so I should use Lysol to spray the room!”

Experience of Anxiety in 2 Forms

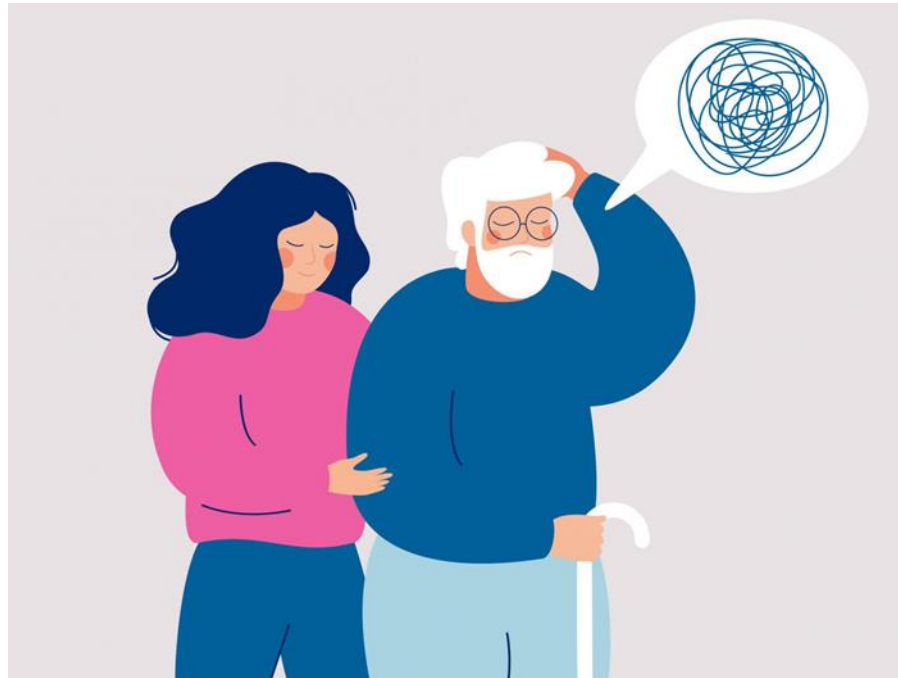
- Some people experience anxiety in just the physical sensation. They feel scared but do not know what they are actually scared of. (Cultural)
- Some people know what they are fearful of and ruminate about it, and are not aware of the physical reactions they have.
- Most people lie somewhere in between.
- A relationship between the 2 forms:



What we can and cannot control

- When we can control our thoughts and feelings, we can deal with the problem.
- When we cannot control our thoughts and feelings, we learn to ways to manage it.
- BUT HOW?

How to Curb Your Anxiety





Self-

Talk

Optimize

Plan

Self Talk

Start with asking yourself:

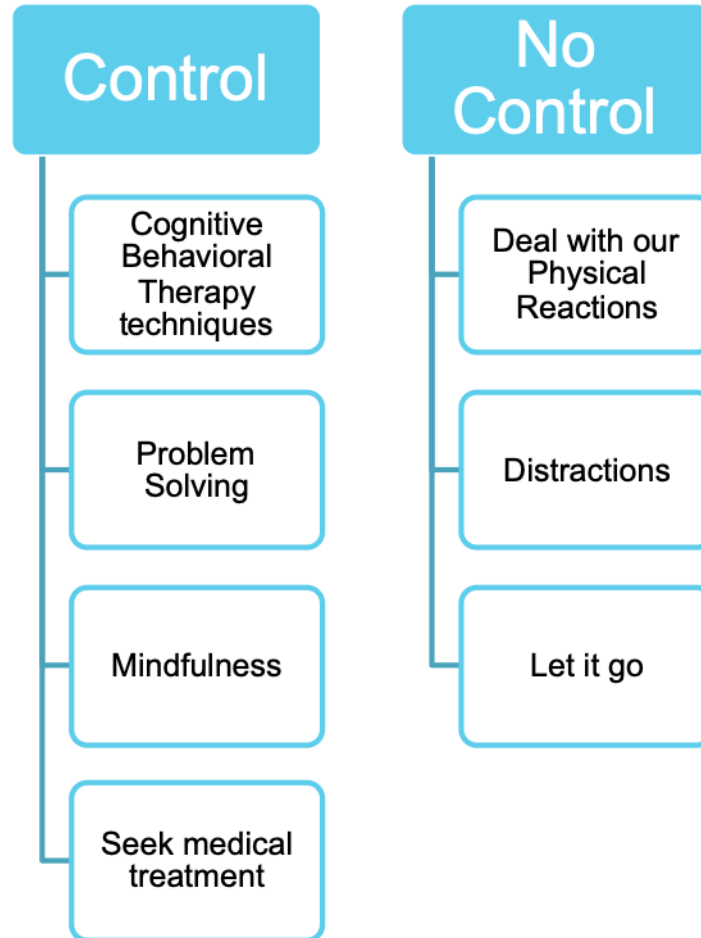
1. What am I afraid of?
2. What are the things I can and cannot control?

For example: I am afraid of getting COVID-19

Can Control	Cannot Control
Washing my hands	How many current cases
Wearing a mask	Whether other people take precautions
How we spend our time	How long pandemic will last
Reaching out for support	Die from COVID

Self Talk

Ways of Dealing with your thoughts



Optimize

Ways of dealing with Physical Reactions (counteract flight/flight)

- Exercise – ongoing, consistent, long game
- Relaxation strategies
 - Deep breathing, body scan, progressive relaxation, meditation, yoga, visual imagery, listening to music, etc.
- Activities
 - Stay engaged: quiet time equals think of worst time!
 - Especially social activities – during the pandemic/lockdown, the use of virtual methods to stay connected has been very important.
- Medications:
 - Anti-depressants and anti-anxiolytics (warning about Benzodiazapines)

Plan

- Prepare in advance: when we are anxious, our ability to think is lower. Preplan our distractions and activities
- A lot of strategies takes time to learn e.g. mindfulness
- Develop interests/hobbies ^(ex), regular exercise routine, and social support networks (formal and informal)
- Think of which activities you can do. Activities that are:
 - i. Sustainable over time, not one shot things.
 - ii. Have meaning: taking care of grandkids, help community.
 - iii. Readily available.
- Which self-talk and optimizing strategies works for you?

Tips on How to Take Care of Your Mental Health

Review

- Exercise, exercise, exercise, ...
- Get a good nights sleep (another thing to optimize, but that's a whole other workshop)
- Learn “self-talk” strategies
- Develop meaningful activities to engage in, especially social activities; BEFORE YOU RETIRE!!!!!!!!!!
- Learn some form of relaxation, so when you need it, it's already there for you.
- Seek medical treatment when necessary.

- And, if you cannot control things (e.g., you live alone and do not have family around), develop a support network, because there is nothing more comforting than someone who is able and willing to listen.



Be Well and Stay Safe