

RECOGNIZING AND MANAGING ANXIETY

INFORMATION FOR OLDER ADULTS, FAMILIES,
AND CAREGIVERS



READ THIS PAMPHLET TO LEARN:

- What Anxiety Is.
- How to Manage Anxiety.
- How to Support Someone Who Has Anxiety.



**Sinai
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Healthy Ageing
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WHAT IS ANXIETY?

As we age, we often go through many life changes in a short period of time. Some of these changes can be positive, such as welcoming grandchildren, though some changes are more challenging, such as learning to live with chronic health conditions and having to move into a new living environment.



It's normal to feel anxious in these situations, but if your anxiety interferes with living your day-to-day life in a major way or causes significant physical and mental distress, you may have an anxiety disorder and you may benefit from the support of a mental health professional.

Anxiety can occur alone, in combination with depression, or as a result of anxiety-causing medications and the misuse of alcohol and other substances.

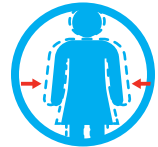
There are proactive steps you can take to cope with feelings of anxiety that may be interfering with your everyday activities.

Read this pamphlet to learn how to identify anxiety, different forms of anxiety, what causes anxiety, and how to develop strategies to cope with its effects.

WHAT CAN ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

A person with anxiety may show some of the following symptoms:

- Excessive worrying and catastrophizing
- Low self-confidence and avoidance of situations
- Intense states of fear and panic
- On edge, unsettled, keyed up
- Irritability
- Physical symptoms of headaches, stomach upset, palpitations and chest pain, sweating
- Fatigue
- Poor sleep
- Changed sex drive
- Weight loss
- Restlessness or slow movement
- Preoccupation with health problems



WHAT ARE COMMON TYPES OF ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety can present in many different forms, including phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Each type has unique signs and symptoms, which are important to know in order to recognize which form of anxiety you or a loved one may have.



GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

This is the most common type of anxiety disorder for older adults. It causes people to worry excessively about everyday situations and events. The condition usually lasts at least six months and can cause restlessness, fatigue, muscle tension and insomnia.



PANIC DISORDER

This form of anxiety causes sudden panic attacks that can seem to come out of the blue. Symptoms of panic attacks include chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, stomach discomfort and fear of dying.



PHOBIAS

Fear is a normal emotion, but when it keeps us from leading our everyday lives, it can become a phobia and considered a condition. There are many different types of phobias, including social phobia, which causes people to fear social situations, as well as more specific phobias such as fear of flying, bugs or leaving the house. The most common phobia in older adults is the fear of falling.



POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

This is an anxiety disorder that is triggered when someone relives a traumatic event in which they experience mental, emotional or physical harm. Survivors of traumatic events such as rape, natural disasters, child abuse or war may develop post-traumatic stress disorder.



OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER

This causes people to have persistent unwanted thoughts and/or behavioural patterns that they cannot control. Common obsessions include worrying about getting dirty, doubting one's actions, and experiencing disturbing sexual and religious thoughts. Typical compulsions include constant washing, organizing, checking and counting.

WHO IS LIKELY TO BE DIAGNOSED WITH ANXIETY?

You are at increased risk of developing an anxiety disorder if you

- Have had a previous diagnosis of anxiety
- Have a medical or psychiatric condition
- Have poor health
- Have suffered a recent trauma
- Lack social supports
- Are female

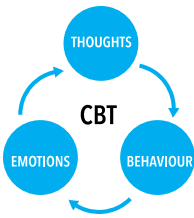
WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

The following factors can contribute to anxiety disorder:

- Stress
- Trauma
- Chronic Grief
- Frailty
- Medical Illness
- Loss

HOW CAN WE MANAGE ANXIETY?

Three main strategies can be used to manage anxiety.



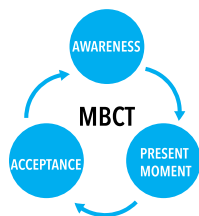
COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) usually consists of 12 to 15 weekly one-hour sessions during which individuals learn to cope with situations that cause them stress or anxiety. The main coping technique used is 'exposure therapy' which is a process through which patients become more exposed to the thing that makes them anxious. Patients also learn to identify distorted or exaggerated thoughts and feelings associated with the things and situations that cause their anxiety. Through practice and exposure, individuals learn to deal with situations that cause them to feel anxious.



MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) looks at the stress of living and how it affects our experience. In MBSR, individuals learn to recognize habitual, unhelpful reactions to difficulty and learn instead to bring an interested, accepting and non-judgmental attitude to all experience, including difficult sensations, emotions, thoughts and behaviour.



MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is an evidence-based form of group therapy for preventing relapses of anxiety and depression. It combines cognitive therapy and meditative practices to help individuals become acquainted with mood disorders and develop more positive relationships with them. It is typically delivered in an 8-week group therapy program.

Depending on the severity and type of anxiety symptoms, your doctor may prescribe medications. It is important to take medications as prescribed, as self-medication can increase the risks of addiction, falls and cognitive impairment.

WHAT ARE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO HAS ANXIETY?

If you believe that you or a loved one has anxiety, the first thing you should do is talk to your primary care provider who can run tests to rule out contributing medical causes and recommend treatment. Treatment can include medication, talk therapy, stress reduction, learning coping skills, as well as family and social support.



Aside from medication, changing certain behaviours can help you to manage symptoms of anxiety. Cutting down on caffeine, smoking, over-eating, alcohol and news intake, as well as getting regular exercise can help to better manage feelings of anxiety. You can learn simple coping skills using the resources listed below, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and setting aside worry time.

It can also be helpful to discuss your fears with friends and family members. Discuss what you're worried about and set specific goals to help you manage the symptoms of anxiety.

Supporting a loved one who is struggling with an anxiety disorder can be challenging and difficult. In some older adults with anxiety, their condition can interfere with their personal life as well as that of their unpaid caregivers and care providers. If you are providing care for a loved one, here are some tips and things to remember:

- It's not their fault. Feelings of anger, hurt, resentment or disappointment caused by anxiety are nobody's fault.
- Be patient with the person experiencing anxiety.
- If the person experiencing anxiety is learning new skills, offer support. However, avoid pushing unwanted advice

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONLINE AND BOOK RESOURCES FOR MANAGING ANXIETY

ONLINE:

Anxiety Canada: www.anxietycanada.com

- information to help people practice ways to manage anxiety at their own pace

Big White Wall®: www.bigwhitewall.com

- anonymous online peer support moderated by mental health professionals
- self-guided courses, self-improvement tools and resources

Living Life to the Full: www.livinglifetothefull.ca

- life skills course using cognitive behavioural therapy approach

BOOKS:

The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety: A Guide to Breaking Free from Anxiety, Phobias, and Worry Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy by J.P. Forsyth and G.H. Eifert

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook. by E.J. Bourne

APPS:

What's Up - Uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy techniques to help you cope with depression, anxiety, anger and stress.

Stop Panic and Anxiety - Panic assistance audio provides coaching to help learn to tolerate and control anxiety symptoms.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

CANADIAN COALITION FOR SENIORS' MENTAL HEALTH

The Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health promotes the mental health of older adults by sharing and connecting individuals to resources.



<https://ccsmh.ca>

<https://ccsmh.ca/resources/covid-19-resources/>

CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

The Canadian Mental Health Association provides information and services for individuals who are struggling with a mental health issue and would benefit from support.



www.toronto.cmha.ca

THE CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH AT BAYCREST

The Centre for Mental Health is a multi-component treatment program for people dealing with late-life mental health problems.



www.baycrest.org/care/care-programs/centre-for-mental-health

TORONTO SENIORS HELPLINE

The Toronto Seniors Helpline offers supportive counselling over the phone, risk assessments, crisis de-escalation and triage to mobile crisis teams including Crisis Outreach Service for Seniors (COSS)



416-217-2077

1-877-621-2077

WOODGREEN WALK-IN COUNSELLING SERVICE

WoodGreen's Walk-in Counselling Service offers free, immediate counselling to address a wide range of concerns, such as anxiety and depression. No appointment or referral is needed, and there are no restrictions to access. It is open on Tuesday and Wednesday from 4:30 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.



<http://woodgreen.org/ServiceDetail.aspx?id=266>

CENTRE FOR ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH (CAMH)

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) provides outpatient services to individuals with mood and anxiety disorders. It further provides group therapy to individuals who may benefit from it.



<https://www.camh.ca/en/your-care/programs-and-services/mood-anxiety-ambulatory-services>

WELLNESS TOGETHER CANADA

Wellness Together Canada is a mental health and substance use website to support people across Canada and Canadians living abroad in both official languages



<https://ca.portal.gs/about/>

RELEVANT RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES

- Alcohol and Your Health
- Managing Chronic Pain
- Managing Common Mental Health Conditions in Older Adults
- Managing Sedative-Hypnotic Use Among Older Adults
- Recognizing and Managing Depression

ADDITIONAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Advance Care Planning: How to Start the Conversation
- Calcium, Vitamin D and Bone Health
- General Tips for Memory Problems
- Improving Nutrition as You Age
- Improving Urinary Incontinence
- Living Longer, Living Well: Your Guide to Healthy Ageing
- Managing Caregiver Stress
- Managing Constipation
- Managing Mild Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer's Disease And Other Dementias
- Managing Multiple Chronic Health Conditions
- Managing Sleep in Older Adults
- Managing Substance Use and Addictive Disorders As You Age
- Preventing Falls at Home
- Recognizing and Managing Delirium
- Recognizing and Managing Hearing Loss
- Safe Medication Use for Older Adults
- Substitute Decision Makers and Powers of Attorney
- Understanding Your Palliative Care Options

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES IN OUR SERIES:

- Community Transportation Options
- Driving Assessment Services
- Elder Abuse
- Funding for Mobility and Other Aids from the Assistive Devices Program
- Housing Options for Older Adults
- How to Register for Wheel-Trans
- Meals on Wheels

Visit www.sinaigeriatrics.ca/healtheducation for additional resources for older adults, families and caregivers.

This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

We would like to thank the following for their support of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing Initiative:



**The Ben and
Hilda Katz
Foundation**



Mon Sheong Foundation and the Ben and Hilda Katz Foundation have generously provided funding to support printing and translation of our Education Resources to Support Healthy Ageing.

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility supported this initiative with funding through its Seniors Community Grant Program.