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# Your Body's Response to Anxiety

Anxiety is part of the body's natural defense system. It's an alert to a threat. The threat may be unknown, vague, or from your own internal fears. While you're in this state, your feelings can range widely. You may feel a sense of worry. You may have physical feelings, such as a racing heartbeat. These feelings make you want to react to the threat. An anxiety response is common in many situations. But some people may have an anxiety disorder. Then the same response can occur too much or at the wrong times.

## Anxiety can be helpful

Anxiety is a signal from your brain. It warns you of a threat. It's a common response to help you prevent something. Or it helps you to decrease the bad effects of something you can't control. For example, anxiety is a response to things that might harm your body, separate you from a loved one, or cause you to lose your job. The symptoms of anxiety can be physical and mental.

## How does it feel?

People with anxiety may have any of these symptoms:

### Physical symptoms

- Dizziness
- Muscle tension or pain
- Restlessness
- Sleeplessness
- Racing heartbeat
- Fast breathing
- Shaking or trembling
- Stomachache
- Diarrhea
- Loss of energy
- Sweating
- Cold, sweaty hands
- Chest pain
- Dry mouth

### Emotional symptoms

- Irritability

- Difficulty concentrating
- Worrying

## **Anxiety can also be a problem**

Anxiety can become a problem when it is:

- Hard to control
- Occurs for months
- Causes problems with important parts of your life

With an anxiety disorder, your body has symptoms of anxiety too often or too much. The response depends on the type of anxiety disorder. With some types of disorders, the anxiety is much more than needed for the threat that triggers it. With other types, anxiety may occur when there isn't a clear threat or trigger.

## **Who has anxiety?**

Some people are more likely to have a lot of anxiety than others. This tends to run in families. And it affects more younger people than older people. It's more common in women than men. But no age, race, or gender is immune to anxiety problems.

## **Anxiety can be treated**

Anxiety that disrupts your life can be treated. Your healthcare provider can rule out any physical problems that may cause the anxiety symptoms. If you are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, mental healthcare will help.

An anxiety disorder is an illness. It can respond to treatment. Most types of anxiety disorders are helped with talk therapy (counseling) and medicines. Your healthcare provider can help you develop skills to cope with anxiety. You can work to gain perspective. This can help you overcome fears. Good sources of support or guidance can be found in many places. You'll find support at your local hospital, mental health clinic, or an employee assistance program.



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# How to manage anxiety

Here are some things you can do to cope:

- **Do what you can.** Keep in mind that you can't control everything. Change what you can. And let the rest take its course.
- **Exercise.** This is a great way to ease tension. It can help your body feel relaxed.
- **Don't use caffeine or nicotine.** These can make anxiety symptoms worse.
- **Stay sober.** Don't use alcohol or misuse prescribed medicines. They only make things worse over time.
- **Learn more about anxiety disorders.** Keep track of helpful online resources and books you can use during stressful periods.
- **Work on stress management.** Try methods, such as meditation.
- **Talk with others.** Join an online or in-person support group.
- **Get medical care.** Mental health services can help you manage your symptoms if the above methods don't help enough.