



ANXIETY DISORDERS

Information for Patients and Families Covenant Health Mental Health Program Grey Nuns Community Hospital & Misericordia Community Hospital

What is an anxiety disorder?

If you worry so much that you cannot live your life the way you would like to (for example, you avoid leaving the house because of your worries), you may have an *anxiety disorder*. Sometimes, severe anxiety can come in the form of *panic attacks*.

The good news is that anxiety can be treated quite effectively.

Most people experience anxiety. However, it becomes a problem when the anxiety feels out of control.

A person with an anxiety disorder will have **four or more** of the following:

- shortness of breath
- dizziness, light headedness
- fatigue
- a fear of losing control, doing something embarrassing, or dying
- a feeling something is wrong
- a fear of going crazy.
- feeling hot or sweaty
- a feeling of choking or being smothered
- numbness or tingling in hands or feet
- a pounding heart
- restlessness
- a feeling the worst will happen (scared)
- shaky hands, stomach upset
- tension
- wobbly or weak legs (unsteady)

Check with your doctors if any of these symptoms interfere with your life.

Some people may begin to avoid certain circumstances or events as a way to manage their anxiety. However, avoidance can make the anxiety worse. Avoidance can lead to isolation, which usually has a negative effect on well-being.

What causes anxiety disorders?

The cause is not known. Some things we do know that may contribute to anxiety are:

- a family history of anxiety
- serious and upsetting situations in a person's life
- body chemistry
- personality
- certain thought patterns

What are anxiety disorders called?

There are many kinds of anxiety disorders, including:

- Acute Stress Disorder
- Agoraphobia (fear of going out)
- Anxiety disorder related to a medical condition
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Attacks
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (recurring bad memories and/or nightmares)
- Specific Phobia
- Social Phobia
- Substance Induced Anxiety Disorder

Your doctor can help to figure out if you have one of the above anxiety disorders.

What can you do about anxiety disorders?

Assessment: Be sure you have had a thorough check up by your doctor, as there are physical reasons that can cause feelings of anxiety.

Medications: Your doctor may order medications to help you. It is *very important* to take them as prescribed, and to let your doctor know how well they are working.

Learn as much as you can about the type of anxiety you have, how it is treated, and what you can do for yourself. As well, learn about your medications. Ask the staff for information, as there are books, pamphlets and videos you can use.

Relaxation: There are many ways to help you relax. Breathing exercises, physical exercises or relaxation training may help.

Activity: Have something to do every day. Anxious people often worry more if they are bored. Hobbies, and exercise, as well as healthy eating and sleeping habits help.

Diet: Do not use alcohol or cannabis, as these can make anxiety worse. They may seem helpful at first, but they create their own problems when used as a way of coping.

Thoughts: When anxious, write down your thoughts and feelings as accurately as you can. For example, what you are worried about will happen. Consider if your thoughts are completely accurate and realistic. If not, rehearse a more accurate or realistic thought, then resume your daily activities.

Support: Find people in your life (family and friends) who are very positive, and whom you enjoy being with.

Controlling your symptoms will help you to:

- ***feel better about yourself***
- ***feel more in control***
- ***improve your self esteem***

Where can you get more information?

- ask your doctor or nurse
- ask a psychologist or social worker
- ask a trained therapist
- call Health Link - 780 408-5465

This information was written by the Patient Education Committee in the Mental Health Program, Covenant Health in January 2009. Permission is given to photocopy as is. Reorder Form # 90196.