

## SOME ANXIETY IS NORMAL AND CAN BE HELPFUL.

*Sometimes anxiety becomes too severe and starts to dominate our lives.*

You may have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder if:

- You experience a lot of fear or worry that takes up most of your day
- You constantly dwell on thoughts that are unwanted or unhelpful to you
- You have trouble relaxing or sitting still
- You often feel afraid that something awful might happen
- You always avoid certain situations because of the anxiety you feel
- You have an intense fear of being judged or embarrassed in front of other people
- You have regular panic attacks where it feels like you can't breathe or think clearly
- You are often bothered by physical symptoms such as sweating, shaking, nausea, dizziness, chest pain that are not related to any medical condition
- Things that make you anxious don't usually make other people anxious
- Anxiety stops you from enjoying or experiencing the things in life you want to do

## THERE ARE MANY WAYS ANXIETY CAN BE MANAGED.

*You can work with your health care providers to choose the treatments that will help you most.*

Some of these options include:

### Non-medication therapy

- **Self-help therapy:** use online or printed materials to help you understand and overcome anxiety. These can include educational lessons, guided meditation and mindfulness, reading the stories of others, and other tools.
- **Working with a therapist:** see a professional counsellor (in person or by video) for extra support in working through your thoughts and feelings. Often talking to someone can be very helpful!
- **Other non-medication options:** explore other practices such as mindfulness, meditation, acceptance and commitment-based therapy, yoga or other relaxation activities. Try to increase your physical activity, have good sleeping habits, and eat a healthy diet.

**The most helpful type of therapy for anxiety is called cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).** It helps you see the connections between your thoughts, actions, and feelings, and teaches you how to get back control of your life. You can do this on your own, in a group, or with a therapist.

See [RxFiles: CBT for Anxiety](#) or scan the QR code for more information on what CBT is and how to access it!



### Medication

Medication can be very helpful at reducing anxiety, and sometimes it is needed to make you feel like yourself again. Although it might sound odd, the medications most commonly prescribed for anxiety are actually known as 'antidepressants'. Other medications might also be prescribed in some situations. The full picture about how exactly medications are working to treat anxiety is not known. One part of the picture is that an imbalance of chemicals in the brain (such as serotonin, norepinephrine, glutamate, and others) can worsen anxiety, and medications can help improve the function of these chemicals.

#### *Tips about medication therapy*

- **It might get worse before it gets better.** When first starting or increasing the dose of an antidepressant, agitation, racing thoughts, jitteriness, and anxiety can be common. These side effects usually only last for 1-2 weeks.
- **Patience is key.** Some people may start noticing some improvement within 2-4 weeks after starting an antidepressant, but often 6-12 weeks are needed to see the full benefit.
- **Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint.** If a medication helps reduce your anxiety, it should be taken regularly for at least 12 months. Sometimes a medication can be stopped shortly after this 12 month period once the body becomes calmer and thoughts become clearer. Other times people need to keep using medication longer than 12 months so that anxiety doesn't become a problem again.
- **Try not to suddenly stop taking your medications.** If you would like to stop taking your medication for anxiety, discuss this with your prescriber and health care team so that it can be done safely.

## SOME THINGS CAN MAKE ANXIETY WORSE – AND YOU MAY NOT NOTICE.

*Many times, you might be able to change these things.*

### Changeable things or situations that can make anxiety worse:

- **Caffeine:** it may take some time to reduce or remove caffeine completely from your diet, but it can make a huge difference.
- **Alcohol:** drinking often makes mood and anxiety worse in the long run, especially if you find you are drinking alcohol to try and manage your anxiety or cope with stress. Drinking can also lead to less restful sleep.
- **Cannabis:** it may seem like cannabis is helping your anxiety, but often it makes anxiety worse over time, especially in between doses. Cannabis has also been shown to increase the risk of psychosis or mood disorders.
- **Social media:** for some people, using social media is harmless, or even helpful. For other people, it can be problematic. Ask yourself: after spending time on social media, is my anxiety usually better or worse?
- **Avoidance behaviours:** sometimes it feels easier and safer to stay away from anything that causes you anxiety. It is important for wellness and recovery to take small steps to face these fears instead of letting them control your life.

## MAKE A PLAN FOR WHEN YOU MIGHT NEED HELP!

*Don't wait until you need it.*

### Part of treatment is making a safety plan that includes:

- **Your symptoms of recurrence or relapse:** how will you know if anxiety is becoming a problem for you?
- **When to ask for help:** what are the warning signs that mean you need help?
- **Whom to ask for help:** write down the names of people and contact information.

### Sample Safety Plan

My usual symptoms of anxiety	Warning signs that tell me I need extra help	People I will contact, or other steps I will take	Contact information

### Emergency Numbers

- Call **9-1-1** for medical or mental health emergencies.
- Canadian Suicide Prevention and Support – call: **1-833-456-4566**, text: **45645**, visit: [www.talksuicide.ca](http://www.talksuicide.ca)
- Call **8-1-1** Healthline Saskatchewan for confidential mental health & addictions advice, education and support.
- Call **2-1-1** Saskatchewan or visit <https://sk.211.ca/> to find the right support services for you.

Scan this QR code for more mental health resources.



### Other resources and information

- Info sheet: What is anxiety and how can I deal with it? <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/infosheet/what-is-anxiety>
- Anxiety Canada website: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/>
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health website, Mental Health 101: <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-101>
- Anxiety information guide from CAMH: <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/guides-and-publications/anxiety-disorders-information-guide2016.pdf>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness website: <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions>

