



Having anxiety is hard, but you can feel better. Learning new skills can give you relief from anxiety.



Feeling worried, anxious, and nervous is sometimes a part of everyday life. The fact is that everyone worries or feels anxious at times. However, it is not normal when anxiety weighs you down or makes it hard to enjoy daily life.

There are two types of anxiety symptoms: physical and emotional.

Physical symptoms

- being edgy
- feeling tired or out of breath
- muscle tension
- not being able to sleep
- fast heartbeat
- sweaty or cold, clammy hands

Emotional symptoms

- fear
- worrying
- can't relax
- easily irritated
- thinking that something bad is going to happen

Anxiety or fear of a specific situation can cause many of these symptoms. When it passes, the symptoms stop. Some people get anxiety disorders when many of these symptoms happen without a known cause.

Phobias and panic attacks

You may have heard the words “phobia” or “panic attacks.” Phobias are fears of common places, things, or events. During a panic attack you may get a rush of fear even though there is no real danger. You may notice that you breathe faster, start shaking or feel faint. Your heart may also beat harder. Self-care, along with help from a doctor, can help manage these feelings and symptoms.

Ways to care for yourself

Reach out. Anxiety is stressful and facing it is a challenge. Talk to loved ones, family members or friends who can support you.

Tell yourself: “This is not an emergency. I do not feel well, but I am not in danger. I can keep going, even though I feel anxious.”

Schedule “worry time.” Set aside a time each day, from 15 minutes to one hour, to do all your worrying. Spend the whole time thinking of all of your fears. Write them down in detail. When worries come to mind during other parts of the day, save them on a list for the next worry time.

Anxiety: Ways to Care for Yourself and Feel Better

Cut down on caffeine. If you drink coffee or soda, have only two, 6 oz. cups of coffee or one 12 oz. soda per day. Caffeine makes anxious feelings worse and can make it hard to sleep.

Do not use alcohol, drugs or tobacco to cope with anxiety. Even a little bit can make you feel worse. Nicotine can make you feel edgy.

Get moving. Exercise can help with your anxiety. Try to get 20–30 minutes of movement three times per week. You can split your activity up, as long as it adds up to 20–30 minutes. The more you move, the easier it is to reduce your anxiety.

Do deep breathing to relax. Take slow, deep breaths to reduce your anxiety symptoms. Try this exercise when you are feeling anxious: Count to four as you breathe in through your nose. Breathe deeply into your belly. Now breathe out even more slowly through your nose for six to eight seconds. Continue to breathe deeply and count each breath for a few minutes. Deep breathing helps reduce anxious feelings.

Are you thinking about taking herbs?

Some herbs are known to treat anxiety, but can have other serious side effects. Ask your doctor before using herbs to see if they are safe for you.



Herbs and supplements are sold over-the-counter. Kaiser Permanente carries only herb categories for which some evidence exists to show that the herbs may be effective to treat certain medical conditions.

What to do when caring for yourself doesn't work

Having anxiety is hard, but you can feel better. Kaiser Permanente offers classes that teach skills to provide relief from anxiety. Check with your Health Education Center for classes in your area. In some cases, medicine is helpful. You can get help from the Departments of Psychiatry, Behavioral Medicine, or Mental Health at Kaiser Permanente. Make an appointment at your facility.

Call Kaiser Permanente if anxiety . . .

- keeps you from doing your daily activities
- is causing discomfort, and home treatment does not help

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Anxiety Disorders Association of America: adaa.org (240) 485-1001
- National Institute of Mental Health: nimh.nih.gov 866-615-6464
- An End to Panic: Breakthrough Techniques for Overcoming Panic Disorder, E. Zuercher-White, New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 1998
- The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook, M. Davis, E. Eshelman and M. McKay, New Harbinger Publications, 2000
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.