

The
“Jon Doe”
Packet of Care



You Are NOT Alone

Windows of Hope Counseling Center

www.windowsofhopecounseling.org

1. Focus on your Breath
2. Drink Water
3. Take a 10 Minute Walk
4. Get Some Sleep
5. Take a Shower
6. Clean Your Room
7. Eat Some Protein
8. Sunlight is Medicine

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What is Anxiety Disorder?

Anxiety is a **normal reaction to stress**. Mild levels of anxiety can be beneficial in some situations. It can alert us to dangers and help us prepare and pay attention.

Anxiety disorders differ from normal feelings of nervousness or anxiousness and involve excessive fear or anxiety. Anxiety disorders are the **most common** of mental disorders. They affect nearly 30% of adults at some point in their lives. However, **anxiety disorders are treatable** with a number of psychotherapeutic treatments.

Treatment helps most people lead normal productive lives.

Anxiety refers to anticipation of a future concern and is more associated with muscle tension and avoidance behavior.

Fear is an emotional response to an immediate threat and is more associated with a fight or flight reaction – either staying to fight or leaving to escape danger.

Anxiety disorders can cause people to try to avoid situations that trigger or worsen their symptoms. Job performance, schoolwork and personal relationships can be affected. In general, for a person to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, the fear or anxiety must:

- Be out of proportion to the situation or be age-inappropriate
- Hinder their ability to function normally

What are anxiety disorders?. Psychiatry.org - What are Anxiety Disorders? (n.d.).

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/anxiety-disorders/what-are-anxiety-disorders>

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Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. However, people with anxiety disorders frequently have intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. **Often, anxiety disorders involve repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks).**

These feelings of anxiety and panic interfere with daily activities, are **difficult to control**, are out of proportion to the actual danger and can last a long time. You may avoid places or situations to prevent these feelings. Symptoms may start during childhood or the teen years and continue into adulthood.

Examples of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder (social phobia), specific phobias and separation anxiety disorder. You can have more than one anxiety disorder. Sometimes anxiety results from a medical condition that needs treatment.

Whatever form of anxiety you have, treatment can help.

Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2018, May 4). *Anxiety disorders*. Mayo Clinic.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anxiety/symptoms-causes/syc-20350961>

Types of Anxiety Disorders

Agoraphobia (ag-uh-ruh-FOE-be-uh) is a type of anxiety disorder in which you fear and often avoid places or situations that might cause you to panic and make you feel trapped, helpless or embarrassed.

Agoraphobia is the fear of being in situations where escape may be difficult or embarrassing, or help might not be available in the event of panic symptoms. The fear is out of proportion to the actual situation and lasts generally six months or more and causes problems in functioning. A person with agoraphobia experiences this fear in two or more of the following situations:

- Using public transportation
- Being in open spaces
- Being in enclosed places
- Standing in line or being in a crowd
- Being outside the home alone

The individual actively avoids the situation, requires a companion or endures intense fear or anxiety. Untreated agoraphobia can become so serious that a person may be unable to leave the house. A person can only be diagnosed with agoraphobia if the fear is intensely upsetting, or if it significantly interferes with normal daily activities.

Anxiety disorder due to a medical condition includes symptoms of intense anxiety or panic that are directly caused by a physical health problem.

Generalized anxiety disorder includes persistent and excessive anxiety and worry about activities or events — even ordinary, routine issues. The worry is out of proportion to the actual circumstance, is difficult to control and affects how you feel physically. It often occurs along with other anxiety disorders or depression.

Generalized anxiety disorder involves persistent and excessive worry that interferes with daily activities. This ongoing worry and tension may be accompanied by physical symptoms, such as restlessness, feeling on edge or easily fatigued, difficulty concentrating, muscle tension or problems sleeping. Often the worries focus on everyday things such as job responsibilities, family health or minor matters such as chores, car repairs, or appointments.

Panic disorder involves repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks). You may have feelings of impending doom, shortness of breath, chest pain, or a rapid, fluttering or pounding heart (heart palpitations). These panic attacks may lead to worrying about them happening again or avoiding situations in which they've occurred.

The core symptom of panic disorder is recurrent panic attacks, an overwhelming combination of physical and psychological distress. During an attack, several of these symptoms occur in combination:

- Palpitations, pounding heart or rapid heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Feeling of shortness of breath or smothering sensations

- Chest pain
- Feeling dizzy, light-headed or faint
- Feeling of choking
- Numbness or tingling
- Chills or hot flashes
- Nausea or abdominal pains
- Feeling detached
- Fear of losing control
- Fear of dying

Because the symptoms can be quite severe, some people who experience a panic attack may believe they are having a heart attack or some other life-threatening illness. They may go to a hospital emergency department. Panic attacks may be expected, such as a response to a feared object, or unexpected, apparently occurring for no reason. The mean age for onset of panic disorder is 20-24. Panic attacks may occur with other mental disorders such as depression or PTSD.

Selective mutism is a consistent failure of children to speak in certain situations, such as school, even when they can speak in other situations, such as at home with close family members. This can interfere with school, work and social functioning.

Children with selective mutism do not speak in some social situations where they are expected to speak, such as school, even though they speak in other situations. They will speak in their home around immediate family members, but often will not speak even in front of others, such as close friends or grandparents.

The lack of speech may interfere with social communication, although children with this disorder sometimes use non-spoken or nonverbal means (e.g., grunting, pointing, writing). The lack of speech can also have significant consequences in school, leading to academic problems and social isolation. Many children with selective mutism also experience excessive shyness, fear of social embarrassment and high social anxiety. However, they typically have normal language skills.

Selective mutism usually begins before age 5, but it may not be formally identified until the child enters school. Many children will outgrow selective mutism. For children who also have social anxiety disorder, selective mutism may disappear, but symptoms of social anxiety disorder may remain.

Separation anxiety disorder is a childhood disorder characterized by anxiety that's excessive for the child's developmental level and related to separation from parents or others who have parental roles.

A person with separation anxiety disorder is excessively fearful or anxious about separation from those with whom he or she is attached. The feeling is beyond what is appropriate for the person's age, persists (at least four weeks in children and six months in adults) and causes problems functioning. A person with separation anxiety disorder may be persistently worried about losing the person closest to him or her, may be reluctant or refuse to go out or sleep away from home or without that person, or may experience nightmares about separation. Physical symptoms of distress often develop in childhood, but symptoms can carry through adulthood.

Social anxiety disorder (social phobia) involves high levels of anxiety, fear and avoidance of social situations due to feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness and concern about being judged or viewed negatively by others.

A person with social anxiety disorder has significant anxiety and discomfort about being embarrassed, humiliated, rejected or looked down on in social interactions. People with this disorder will try to avoid the situation or endure it with great anxiety. Common examples are extreme fear of public speaking, meeting new people or eating/drinking in public. The fear or anxiety causes problems with daily functioning and lasts at least six months.

Specific phobias are characterized by major anxiety when you're exposed to a specific object or situation and a desire to avoid it. Phobias provoke panic attacks in some people.

A specific phobia is excessive and persistent fear of a specific object, situation or activity that is generally not harmful. Patients know their fear is excessive, but they can't overcome it. These fears cause such distress that some people go to extreme lengths to avoid what they fear. Examples are public speaking, fear of flying or fear of spiders.

Substance-induced anxiety disorder is characterized by symptoms of intense anxiety or panic that are a direct result of misusing drugs, taking medications, being exposed to a toxic substance or withdrawal from drugs.

Other specified anxiety disorder and unspecified anxiety disorder are terms for anxiety or phobias that don't meet the exact criteria for any other anxiety disorders but are significant enough to be distressing and disruptive.

Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2018, May 4). *Anxiety disorders*.

Mayo Clinic.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anxiety/symptoms-causes/syc-20350961>

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Causes of Anxiety Disorders

Like other types of mental health conditions, researchers don't know exactly what causes anxiety disorders. But they think a combination of factors plays a role:

- **Chemical imbalances:** Several neurotransmitters and hormones play a role in anxiety, including norepinephrine, serotonin, dopamine and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). Imbalances in these chemicals can contribute to an anxiety disorder.
- **Brain changes:** A part of your brain called the amygdala plays an important role in managing fear and anxiety. Studies show that people with anxiety disorders show increased amygdala activity in response to anxiety cues.
- **Genetics:** Anxiety disorders tend to run in biological families. This suggests that genetics may play a role. You may be at an increased risk of developing one if you have a first-degree relative (biological parent or sibling) with an anxiety disorder.
- **Environmental factors:** Severe or long-lasting stress can change the balance of neurotransmitters that control your mood. Experiencing a lot of stress over a long period can contribute to an anxiety disorder. Experiencing a traumatic event can also trigger anxiety disorders.

Past or childhood experiences

Difficult experiences in childhood, adolescence or adulthood are a common trigger for anxiety problems. Going through **stress** and **trauma** when you're very young is likely to have a particularly big impact. Experiences which can trigger anxiety problems include things like:

- physical or emotional **abuse**
- neglect
- **losing a parent**
- being bullied or being socially excluded
- experiencing **racism**.

Having parents who don't treat you warmly or are overprotective can also be a factor.

Your current life situation

Current problems in your life can also trigger anxiety. For example:

- exhaustion or a build-up of **stress**
- lots of change or uncertainty
- feeling under pressure while **studying** or **in work**
- long working hours
- being out of work
- **money problems**
- **housing problems** and homelessness

- worrying about the environment or natural disasters (sometimes called climate anxiety or eco-anxiety)
- **losing someone** close to you (sometimes called bereavement)
- feeling **lonely or isolated**
- **being abused**, bullied or harassed, including experiencing **racism**.

Physical or mental health problems

Other health problems can sometimes cause anxiety, or might make it worse. For example:

- Physical health problems – living with a serious, ongoing or life-threatening physical health condition can sometimes trigger anxiety.
- Other mental health problems – it's also common to develop anxiety while living with **other mental health problems**, such as **depression**.

Drugs and medication

Anxiety can sometimes be a side effect of taking:

- some **psychiatric medications**
- some medications for physical health problems
- **recreational drugs and alcohol**.

Professional, C. C. medical. (n.d.). *Anxiety disorders*. Cleveland Clinic.

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9536-anxiety-disorders>

What causes anxiety problems - mind. (n.d.).

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/causes/>

Food And Mental Health

Some studies suggest that what we eat and drink can affect how we feel. But it can be difficult to know what to eat, especially when healthier foods can be more expensive. And it can be hard to think about our diet when we're struggling with our mental wellbeing.

How can food and drink affect how I feel?

We all react differently to the things in our diet. But there are some foods and drinks that may affect how we feel, in different ways. This section talks about food and drink that might affect how you feel, and has some ideas for how to manage this.

These tips may help some of us think about what to eat and drink. But they are only a guide. Some of us may find them less helpful or achievable, especially when we're feeling unwell – and that's ok.

Blood sugar levels

If your blood sugar is lower than usual, you might feel tired, irritable or depressed. Eating regularly, and eating foods that release energy slowly, can help to keep your sugar levels steady.

Different people may have different reactions to the same foods. But generally, foods that release energy more slowly include:

- Wholegrain bread and cereal
- Nuts and seeds

- Brown pasta
- Brown rice

This is compared to foods like white bread, crisps, white pasta and white rice, which release energy less slowly.

Drinking fluids

If you live with a mental health problem, you may not have the energy or motivation to drink lots of fluids. But if you become dehydrated, this can make it harder to concentrate or think clearly.

Water, tea, coffee, juices and smoothies can all help you feel hydrated. But some of these may also contain caffeine or sugar, which could affect how you feel for different reasons.

It may help to try and track your fluid intake. You could try writing it down or using a reminder on your phone.

Fruits and vegetables

Eating different fruits and vegetables can add a good range of nutrients to your diet. These nutrients help to keep us mentally and physically healthy.

Fresh fruit and vegetables can sometimes be expensive and more difficult to prepare. Frozen, tinned, dried and juiced fruits and vegetables all count towards your 5 a day too, if you want a cheaper or easier alternative.

Protein

Diets higher in protein can support your mental health. Protein contains chemicals called amino acids, which your brain needs to produce chemicals called neurotransmitters. These help to regulate your thoughts and feelings.

You can find protein in foods like:

- Legumes (peas, beans and lentils)
- Nuts and seeds
- Milk
- Fish
- Eggs
- Cheese
- Lean meat
- Soya products

If you're finding it difficult to get enough protein in your diet, you could try adding some grated cheese to a meal, or having a glass of milk. Or you could eat a packet of nuts or seeds.

Caffeine

Caffeine is in tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and other energy drinks. It is a stimulant. This means it can give you a quick burst of energy. But it might also:

- **Make you feel anxious and depressed**
- **Disturb your sleep, especially if you have it just before bed**
- **Give you withdrawal symptoms like feeling irritable or depressed, if you suddenly stop having it**

If you think caffeine is affecting your mood, you could try to slowly reduce how much caffeine you have. For example, you could switch between having a caffeinated drink and a decaf version.

Healthy fats

Your brain needs certain fatty acids, such as omega-3 and omega-6, to keep it working well. You can find these healthy fats in:

- Nuts and seeds
- Avocados
- Oily fish, such as sardines and mackerel (these are often cheaper if you buy them tinned)

Foods for good gut health

Sometimes your gut can reflect your mood. If you're stressed or anxious this can make your gut slow down or speed up. This can lead to problems with digestion, such as feeling bloated or constipated. Or you may not feel as hungry as usual.

If you're feeling stressed and you think it is affecting your gut, you could try some **relaxation techniques** or breathing exercises.

You can also try eating more foods that support healthy digestion. For example, fruits, vegetables and wholegrains. Or pulses, such as tinned or dried beans, peas and lentils. Probiotics, such as live yogurt, tempeh and kimchi, are also good for gut health.

Alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can disrupt chemicals in the brain that are important for good mental health.

Some of us with mental health problems may depend on alcohol to help with feelings that we struggle to deal with in other ways. If you use alcohol in this way, you may be experiencing **addiction**.

Food intolerances and allergies

If you have a food intolerance or allergy, this might affect you physically and mentally. For example, this may be an intolerance or allergy to wheat, dairy or yeast.

How can medication and food interact?

Some foods can be dangerous to eat if you're taking certain medications. They might stop a medication from working as well as it should, or may cause side effects.

You also may need to take some medications before or after you eat or drink. Others may increase or reduce your appetite.

Before prescribing you any medication, your doctor should explain any possible risks or side effects. This is to help you decide whether you want to take it.

How can I manage my diet when I feel unwell?

It can be difficult to eat well when we have poor mental health. These are some tips which might help if you are struggling.

Remember: it's ok to choose more convenient foods if this is what feels possible right now.

Write down how food is making you feel

If you feel able to, write down what you eat and make notes about how you're feeling.

Over time you might work out how certain foods can:

- Make you feel worse, or better
- Keep you awake or give you more energy
- Affect your sleep

Plan ahead

When you're feeling well and have more energy, it can help to plan ahead for times when you don't feel well. Here are some ideas:

- Try making some extra meals to store. You could make enough to last for several days and freeze them in portions to heat up at times when you don't feel like cooking.
- Write a list of easy, affordable meals to make when you're not feeling well. This could include meals like beans on toast or jacket potatoes.
- Stock up on some staple ingredients, if you can. This could include cheaper things that are long-life or tinned. Or you could buy things that you can freeze to use later. These foods will last longer and could save you money.
- Get food shopping delivered to your home. This can save time, but can also be helpful if you don't feel up to leaving the house or being in a supermarket.

Try to accept help from others

When we're not feeling well, we may sometimes get offers of help from other people in our lives.

If you're struggling and someone offers you help, you could suggest that:

- They help with practical things, such as shopping or ordering food
- You plan, cook and eat a meal together, to make the process feel less daunting

Try to make the food preparation process easier

It can take a lot of energy to prepare food or to clean up afterwards. This may feel especially difficult when you're feeling unwell. These tips could help make this process feel easier:

- Wash up as you go. Try washing up bit by bit as you are preparing food. This might help you feel less overwhelmed by the amount of washing up to do after you've finished preparing your meal. If you're really struggling with washing up and it's stopping you from eating what you need to, it might help to try using disposable plates and kitchen towels for a short while.
- Rinse dishes before washing them. This can stop food from sticking to them and make them easier to wash up.

- Make food all in one pot or dish. Some recipe websites or books have one-pot or one-tin recipes. These are useful for reducing the amount of equipment you need to use and clean.
- Try using pre-chopped or frozen fruits and vegetables. This can reduce the amount of food preparation you have to do. Frozen fruit and vegetables are also often cheaper than fresh versions.

Can foods treat anxiety?

Doctors commonly use medication and talk therapy to treat anxiety. But lifestyle changes, such as getting enough sleep and regular exercise, can also help. In addition, some research suggests **the foods you eat may have a beneficial impact on your brain if you frequently experience anxiety.**

These foods include:

- flax and chia seeds
- fatty fish such as mackerel and salmon
- turmeric
- vitamin D
- magnesium
- tryptophan

Food and mental health - mind. (n.d.-a).

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mental-health/>

Holland, K. (2023, January 2). *Anxiety disorders: Causes, types, symptoms, & treatments*.

Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety#treatment>

Anxiety and Alcohol

If you're anxious frequently, you may decide you'd like a drink to calm your nerves. After all, alcohol is a sedative. In addition, it can depress the activity of your central nervous system, which may help you feel more relaxed.

Some people with anxiety disorders abuse alcohol or other drugs regularly to feel better, creating dependency and addiction.

It may be necessary to treat an alcohol or drug problem before doctors can address the anxiety. But chronic or long-term use can ultimately worsen the condition.

Understanding anxiety

When dealing with stressful days or nervous situations, you may be tempted to have a glass of wine or a beer to calm your nerves. However, drinking alcohol, especially heavily and over a long period of time, can actually increase your anxiety.

Drinking alcohol can have serious consequences if you're being treated for anxiety. Having a drink might seem like a good way to ease anxiety, but you may be doing more harm than good.

'Unwinding' with alcohol

There's some truth to the idea that alcohol can reduce stress. Alcohol is a sedative and a depressant that affects the central nervous system.

At first, drinking can reduce fears and take your mind off of your troubles. It can help you feel less shy, give you a boost in mood, and make you feel generally relaxed. In fact, alcohol's effects can be similar to those of antianxiety medications.

Occasionally unwinding with alcohol isn't necessarily dangerous if your doctor approves. But once you start drinking, you can build a tolerance to the de-stressing effects of alcohol. This can make anxiety and stress even more difficult to cope with.

Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol can also have noticeable physical and mental consequences. Over time, consuming too much alcohol can lead to blackouts, loss of memory, and even brain damage (especially if it causes other health problems, such as liver damage). These issues can create more anxiety as you cope with their symptoms.

The sense of relaxation you feel when you drink can often be attributed to your blood alcohol content (BAC). A rise in BAC levels leads to temporary feelings of excitement, but feelings of depression occur as BAC levels fall. As a result, it's possible that having a few drinks that make your BAC rise and then fall back to normal again can make you more anxious than you were before.

How alcohol worsens anxiety

Alcohol changes levels of serotonin and other neurotransmitters in the brain, which can worsen anxiety. In fact, you may feel more anxious after the alcohol wears off.

Alcohol-induced anxiety can last for several hours, or even for an entire day after drinking.

Using alcohol to cope with social anxiety disorder can be dangerous. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), about 7 percent of Americans have this form of anxiety.

With social anxiety, you may find social situations unbearable. It's common for people with social anxiety disorder to drink alcohol to cope with social interactions. Doing this can lead to a dependence on alcohol during socializing, which can make anxiety symptoms worse.

About 20 percent of people with social anxiety disorder also suffer from **alcohol dependence**.

Besides needing alcohol to feel comfortable when socializing, other signs of dependence include:

- needing a drink to get going in the morning
- drinking heavily four or more days per week
- requiring a drink at every get-together
- an inability to stop drinking
- drinking five or more alcoholic beverages in one day

Overconsumption of alcohol can also lead to hangovers. A hangover can cause symptoms that make you feel more anxious than you were, including:

- headaches
- dizziness
- nausea
- dehydration
- low blood glucose (sugar)

Can alcohol cause anxiety?

The long-term consequences of alcohol abuse can be a variety of health problems, including mental health disorders.

Research shows that people with alcoholism find it difficult to recover from traumatic events. This is possibly because of the effects of alcohol abuse, which can actually change brain activity.

Long-term heavy drinkers may be predisposed to developing an anxiety disorder. However, there is no evidence that moderate drinking will cause anxiety.

Increased anxiety is also a symptom of alcohol withdrawal. If you've consumed alcohol in large amounts for a long period of time and suddenly stop drinking, your anxiety can be aggravated by the side effects of alcohol withdrawal. Other symptoms of **alcohol withdrawal** include:

- trembling hands
- sweating

- heart rate above 100 beats per minute
- hallucinations
- nausea
- vomiting
- seizures

Alcohol is not anxiety treatment

Moderate drinking is not the same for all genders and age groups. In the United States, “moderate” typically refers to two drinks a day for adult men and one for women. Older adults metabolize alcohol faster, so if you’re in this age group, limit yourself to one alcoholic beverage per day. Ask your doctor if moderate alcohol consumption is suitable for you.

The benefits of alcohol consumption can sometimes be outweighed by the risks, which include:

- depression
- obesity
- liver disease
- cardiovascular damage

Alcohol affects everyone differently. It can cheer you up after a rough day or make you feel more sedated. Discuss these concerns with your doctor first to see if alcohol is safe for you.

Keep in mind that you may not safely drink alcohol if you have:

- a low tolerance for drinking
- anxious or aggressive tendencies
- a mental health disorder

Alcohol isn't an anxiety treatment. Seek help from a mental health professional if you have anxiety. If you think you have a problem with alcohol, seek help from your doctor right away.

Food and mental health - mind. (n.d.-a).

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mental-health/>

Marijuana and Anxiety

Individuals requiring emergency department treatment for cannabis use were both at substantially increased risk of developing a new anxiety disorder and experiencing worsening symptoms for already existing anxiety disorders.

Marijuana can be used as a temporary relief from GAD symptoms. Again, the moment the effects of the medication wear off, symptoms of anxiety will likely start up again. This required the individual to consistently use marijuana in order to feel normal again.

While marijuana is not an addictive substance, relying on it as your only form of anxiety relief can be harmful. When not taking marijuana, your negative thoughts may increase in severity, causing your anxiety to become worse. It's better to talk with your doctor about the benefits and drawbacks of marijuana for anxiety instead of self-medicating with it.

Marijuana use is strongly associated with generalized anxiety disorder. As the individual is commonly anxious or worried about circumstances in their life, such as relationships, they may rely on marijuana to relieve these stressful feelings. Marijuana may allow the individual to temporarily relax after a stressful day or during a nervous situation.

However, because the stress relief is only temporary, the euphoric high will eventually dissipate and the symptoms of anxiety often return. Marijuana may make a person feel normal temporarily, so the individual may desire to use the drug more often in order to suppress the feelings of stress. Constant marijuana use to subdue anxious

feelings can cause a reliance on the drug to achieve a harmonious chemical makeup within the body. The lack of harmony when sober can cause an individual to experience negative feelings, which can create a stronger desire to use at times that may affect their school or risk their job and relationships. Relying on marijuana also could lead to using more addictive substances, such as opioids or stimulants, to feel calm for longer periods.

Breaking down the numbers from the cannabis and anxiety study

Researchers said they found that 27% of the individuals who went to an emergency department for cannabis use were diagnosed with a new anxiety disorder within three years, compared to 5% of the general population — a nearly 4-fold increase after accounting for social factors and other mental health diagnoses.

They said of those already diagnosed 12% of people who went to an emergency room for cannabis use were hospitalized or visited an emergency room again for an anxiety disorder within three years, compared to 1% of the general population — another nearly 4-fold increased risk after accounting for other mental health diagnosis and social factors.

In people who visited an emergency room with cannabis as the main reason, the risk of hospitalization or another emergency visit for an anxiety disorder increased by more than 9 fold compared to the general population.

The researchers also reported that women and men and individuals of all ages going to an emergency room for cannabis use were at elevated risk of developing new anxiety disorders relative to the general population, with men and younger adults (10 to 24 years) at particularly elevated risk.

Marijuana and Psychosis

Both heavy use and an increase in use from occasional to daily — as well as earlier and longer exposure to pot — have been **linked to psychosis**. “Evidence suggests that pot smoking can lead to earlier onset — that it can develop sooner than it would have otherwise,” says Dr. Birnbaum. “In addition, pot is also associated with development of illness in otherwise healthy individuals, meaning it is possible that psychosis would not have developed in that person if they had never smoked pot.”

But that, he says is “hard to prove for sure and we don’t have a specific number of joints, a specific dose of cannabis, that we know is likely going to trigger a psychotic experience.”

Dr. Birnbaum gets this question from his patients a lot: if I’d never smoked pot, would this have still happened to me? And, he says it’s a question that’s virtually impossible to answer.

Anxiety and substance abuse: A closer look at the connection. Southern California Sunrise Recovery Center. (2024, July 2).

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MediLexicon International. (n.d.). *Anxiety: How heavy cannabis use may increase the risk.* Medical News Today.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/heavy-cannabis-use-increases-risk-of-developing-an-anxiety-disorder-study-suggests>

Anxiety and Substance Abuse Disorders

Anxiety and substance abuse have a very strong link. In order to reduce feelings of anxiety, some may attempt to self-medicate with various substances. Depending on the substance used for self-medication, the individual may develop an addiction.

Drugs and alcohol can provide short-term relief from some anxiety symptoms. However, these results are only temporary. The longer you take the substance, the lesser its effects will be and the more you will need to take in order to feel relief.

This **creates a vicious cycle between addiction and anxiety symptoms.** The type and severity of the anxiety disorder an individual has may vary their reaction to various substances.

Effects of Drug Use on Anxiety Symptoms

Substance use has a large impact on the psychological symptoms of anxiety. When someone consistently uses drugs or alcohol for an extended amount of time, the individual's body may develop a tolerance to the substance, which means he or she may need to increase his or her intake to get the same effects. This process may ignite a cycle of addiction that can be difficult to defeat without professional treatment.

Most individuals with substance use and anxiety disorders develop these struggles separately, but the combination of addiction and anxiety can be a huge burden on one's mental and physical health.

Stimulants and Anxiety

Stimulants are already known to have anxiety as a side effect. Those with a mental illness that require stimulants, such as those with ADHD, are likely to experience heightened severity in their anxiety disorder as a result of the medication. These changes may cause the individual to become more dependent on other substances to relieve their anxiety symptoms.

If you are required to take stimulants with anxiety, make sure you talk to your doctor about your options. They may be able to recommend medication or techniques to help improve your anxiety symptoms.

Prescription Medications and Anxiety

Certain prescription medications, particularly pain killers, can give temporary relief to physical anxiety symptoms, such as cramps, chest pain, and stomach pain. However, these medications tend to be highly addictive. Once you start using them to treat your anxiety, it is nearly impossible to stop.

What Comes First: Anxiety Or Substance Abuse?

More often than not, symptoms of anxiety will trigger an individual to take substances. They are often used as a coping mechanism or form of self-medication. Those who are experiencing extreme hardships that result in increased anxiety symptoms are more likely to use substances as a means of escape.

Anxiety can also worsen as a dependency on substances builds. The more you use certain substances, the worse your symptoms will be as they drain from your system. Over time, this will result in worse feelings of anxiety.

However, **some substances can trigger anxiety disorders.** Alcohol-induced anxiety occurs when an individual consumes alcohol. While the individual may feel as though their anxiety is reduced, this is not the case. As the body learns and adjusts to increased amounts of alcohol in the system, more is needed to achieve the same effects.

Many medications also include feelings of anxiety as a side effect. The more often an individual abuses certain substances, the more likely they are to form an anxiety disorder as a result.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America estimates that 20 percent of individuals diagnosed with an anxiety disorder also have a substance use disorder. Financial difficulties, health troubles, legal problems and relationship conflicts associated with substance abuse can cause a person's anxiety to worsen. Since the symptoms of anxiety may resemble the side effects of alcoholism or drug addiction, distinguishing between the effects of anxiety or addiction can be difficult.

Drug Abuse as a Cause of Anxiety

Individuals struggling with anxiety are at a significant risk of developing an addiction to drugs or alcohol due to the symptoms of the mental illness. As unwanted

symptoms develop, individuals who have anxiety may turn to substances to self-medicate and relax, putting the taxing symptoms on hold for a short time. People may use alcohol and drugs as an outlet to escape the reality of anxiety and produce a sense of happiness.

However, **when someone becomes dependent on alcohol or drugs, they may experience severe anxiety when they are sober.** This uncomfortable situation can lead an individual without prior anxiety to accumulate drug-induced or withdrawal-related anxiety symptoms. The **continued substance abuse can lead to worsened anxiety and may also change the electrical connections in the brain.** It is possible for an individual to obtain **substance-induced anxiety disorder.**

Statistics on Anxiety Disorders and Drug Abuse

Between 18 and 28 percent of people in the general United States population have an anxiety disorder during any given year. Within this percentage of individuals with an anxiety disorder, there is a 33 to 45 percent occurrence rate for a coexisting substance use disorder.

Alcohol is one of the most common drugs consumed in the United States. A survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 2012 showed that about 65 percent of people over the age of 12 reported drinking alcohol in the past year. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America states that 20 percent of people dealing with an anxiety disorder also suffer from some form of alcohol abuse or dependence.

Anxiety and substance abuse: A closer look at the connection. Southern California Sunrise Recovery Center. (2024, July 2).

<https://socal.sunrise.com/anxiety-and-substance-abuse/>

Anxiety and substance abuse: Anxiety and co-occurring Substance use disorders. The Recovery Village Drug and Alcohol Rehab. (2023, August 17).

<https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/mental-health/anxiety/substance-abuse/>

Treatment

Once you've received a diagnosis of anxiety, you can explore treatment options with a doctor.

But treatment can help you overcome the symptoms and lead a more manageable day-to-day life.

Treatment for anxiety falls into **three categories**:

- **Psychotherapy.** Therapy can include **cognitive behavioral therapy** and **exposure response prevention**.
- Complementary health techniques. **Mindfulness, yoga**, and self-management strategies such as **stress management** are ways to treat your anxiety using alternative methods.
- **Medication.** Doctors prescribe antianxiety and antidepressant drugs.

Meeting with a therapist or psychologist can help you learn tools to use and strategies to cope with stress when it occurs.

Medications typically used to treat anxiety include benzodiazepines for short-term symptom relief, but they're avoided if possible due to the high risk of dependence. Other antianxiety or antidepressant medications such as escitalopram effectively alter your brain chemistry to improve mood and reduce stress. Some other commonly used medications include:

- Selective serotonin uptake inhibitors (SSRIs). Escitalopram, fluoxetine, and paroxetine are common SSRIs.
- Selective norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs). Duloxetine and venlafaxine are common SNRIs.
- Antipsychotics. Quetiapine and aripiprazole are common antipsychotics.
- Benzodiazepines. Diazepam and clonazepam are common benzodiazepines.
- Anxiolytics. Buspirone is a common anxiolytic.

What natural remedies are used for anxiety?

Lifestyle changes can effectively relieve some of the stress and anxiety you may cope with every day. Most natural **“remedies”** consist of caring for your body and participating in healthy activities while eliminating unhealthy ones. These include:

- **getting enough sleep**
- **meditating**
- **staying active and exercising**
- **eating a healthy diet**
- **avoiding alcohol**
- **avoiding caffeine**
- **quitting smoking cigarettes if you smoke**

There are many ways to prevent anxiety and its symptoms. Please see the below options:

- **Avoidance.** Avoiding people, places, and situations can lessen your stress and anxiety. But this would be a short-term strategy. In the long term, it's better if you get treatment so you no longer need to avoid a trigger.
- **Stress management and mindfulness.** Practicing stress management and mindfulness prevents strain.
- **Restrict caffeine.** Caffeine can worsen anxiety symptoms.
- **Support groups.** Speaking with others is an opportunity to share coping strategies and experiences.
- **Therapy.** Speaking with a therapist can help you develop more effective ways to cope with fears and stress that lead to anxiety.
- **Speak with a doctor about your medications.** Regularly speaking with a doctor about your medications' dosing, effectiveness, and side effects ensures any health condition is treated adequately and monitored for any possible anxiety-related side effects.

You can treat your anxiety with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of the two.

But some people who have a mild anxiety disorder, or a fear of something they can easily avoid, decide to live with the condition and don't get treatment.

Avoiding the trigger, however, can actually make anxiety worse in the long term.

Treatment can help you overcome the need to avoid a trigger.

It's important to understand that anxiety disorders can be treated, even in severe cases. Although anxiety usually doesn't go away, you can learn to manage it and live a happy, healthy life.

Therapy and Counseling

There are many different forms of counseling that can be used to treat anxiety. Whether you prefer solo counseling or would benefit from group therapy, there are people you can speak with about your disorder. Having someone to talk to about your disorder can help relieve your anxiety.

If you are struggling with substance abuse, there are treatment programs available to help you, too. You don't have to go through your struggle alone; search around for various groups and give them a try. Don't be afraid to test multiple different types of therapy so that you can find what works for you.

Home Remedies

There are techniques you can use to reduce stress from the comforts of home. One of the best things you can do to decrease feelings of anxiety is to improve your sleep schedule. Sleep helps the mind relax and refresh itself after a long day; the better quality sleep you get, the better you will feel.

Exercising for at least 30 minutes each day can also relieve feelings of anxiety. Burning energy off through cardio can take pressure off the mind and body. No

matter what form of exercise you prefer, doing something every day can get rid of those anxious thoughts and get your mind on something else.

Finding a hobby or job that you enjoy can also take your mind off of whatever is causing you anxiety. Test out different hobbies to see what interests you and stick to them. Finding a friend who enjoys the same things can also help improve your mood while doing what you love.

Prescription Medications

If you continue to struggle with anxiety, you may want to talk to your doctor about safe prescription medications for anxiety. There are many types of medication available, so ask about your options. Your practitioner will work with you to find a type of medication that will help your anxiety without causing a dependency on the medication.

Anxiety and substance abuse: A closer look at the connection. Southern California Sunrise Recovery Center. (2024, July 2).

<https://socal.sunrise.com/anxiety-and-substance-abuse/>

Holland, K. (2023, January 2). *Anxiety disorders: Causes, types, symptoms, & treatments.* Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety#treatment>

Managing anxiety

Some of the management options for anxiety disorders include:

- learning about anxiety
- mindfulness
- relaxation techniques
- correct breathing techniques
- cognitive therapy
- behavior therapy
- counseling
- dietary adjustments
- exercise
- learning to be assertive
- building self-esteem
- structured problem solving
- **medication**
- support groups

Learning about anxiety

The old adage ‘knowledge is power’ applies here – learning all about anxiety is central to recovery. For example, education includes examining the physiology of the ‘flight-or-fight’ response, which is the body’s way to deal with impending danger. For people with anxiety disorders, this response is inappropriately triggered by situations

that are generally harmless. Education is an important way to promote control over symptoms.

Mindfulness

When feeling anxious, a person can spend a significant amount of time caught up in anxiety-provoking thoughts. **Mindfulness** guides us to bring our attention back to the present moment and unhook from thoughts that may be unhelpful.

Mindfulness is becoming more and more popular as people start to realize how beneficial it is for a number of issues. There are many resources available to support you to develop a mindfulness practice.

Relaxation techniques

A person who feels anxious most of the time has trouble relaxing, but knowing how to release muscle tension can be a helpful strategy. Relaxation techniques include:

- progressive muscle relaxation
- **abdominal breathing**
- isometric relaxation exercises.

Correct breathing techniques

The physical symptoms of anxiety may be triggered by **hyperventilation**, which raises oxygen levels and reduces the amount of carbon dioxide in the blood. Carbon dioxide assists in the regulation of the body's reaction to anxiety and panic.

It can be helpful for a person who suffers from anxiety to learn how to breathe from their diaphragm, rather than their chest, to safeguard against hyperventilation. The key is allowing your belly to expand as you breathe in.

You can make sure you are breathing correctly by placing one hand on your lower abdomen and the other on your chest. Correct breathing means your abdomen moves, rather than your chest. It also helps to slow your breathing while feeling anxious.

Some people can find abdominal breathing challenging. There are many **other breathing techniques that you can try**. You can also try to hold your breath for a few seconds. This helps to boost carbon dioxide levels in the blood.

Cognitive therapy

Cognitive therapy focuses on changing patterns of thinking and beliefs that are associated with, and trigger, anxiety. For example, a person with a social phobia may make their anxiety worse by negative thoughts such as, 'Everyone thinks I'm boring'.

The basis of cognitive therapy is that beliefs trigger thoughts, which then trigger feelings and produce behaviours. For example, let's say you believe (perhaps unconsciously) that you must be liked by everyone in order to feel worthwhile. If someone turns away from you in mid-conversation, you may think, 'This person hates me', which makes you feel anxious.

Cognitive therapy strategies include rational 'self-talk', reality testing, attention training, cognitive challenging and cognitive restructuring. This includes monitoring your self-talk, challenging unhelpful fears and beliefs, and testing out the reality of negative thoughts.

Behavior therapy

A major component of behavior therapy is exposure. Exposure therapy involves deliberately confronting your fears in order to desensitize yourself. Exposure allows you to train yourself to redefine the danger or fear aspect of the situation or trigger.

The steps of exposure therapy may include:

- Rank your fears in order, from most to least threatening.
- Choose to work first on one of your least threatening fears.
- Think about the feared situation. Imagine yourself experiencing the situation.
Analyze your fears -- what are you afraid of?
- Work out a plan that includes a number of small steps – for example, gradually decrease the distance between yourself and the feared situation or object, or gradually increase the amount of time spent in the feared situation.
- Resist the urge to leave. Use relaxation, breathing techniques and coping statements to help manage your anxiety.
- Afterwards, appreciate that nothing bad happened.
- Repeat the exposure as often as you can to build confidence that you can cope.

- When you are ready, tackle another feared situation in the same step-by-step manner.

Dietary adjustments

The mineral magnesium helps muscle tissue to relax, and a magnesium deficiency can contribute to anxiety, depression and insomnia. Inadequate intake of vitamin B and calcium can also exacerbate anxiety symptoms.

Nicotine, caffeine and stimulant drugs (such as those that contain caffeine) trigger your adrenal glands to release adrenaline, which is one of the main stress chemicals. These are best avoided. Other foods to avoid include salt and artificial additives, such as preservatives. Choose fresh, unprocessed foods whenever possible.

Exercise

The physical symptoms of anxiety are caused by the 'flight-or-fight' response, which floods the body with adrenaline and other stress chemicals. Exercise burns up stress chemicals and promotes relaxation. Physical activity is another helpful way to manage anxiety. Aim to do some physical activity at least three to four times every week, and vary your activities to avoid boredom.

Learning to be assertive

Being **assertive** means communicating your needs, wants, feelings, beliefs and opinions to others in a direct and honest manner without intentionally hurting anyone's feelings. A person with an anxiety disorder may have trouble being assertive

because they are afraid of conflict or believe they have no right to speak up. However, relating passively to others lowers self-confidence and reinforces anxiety. Learning to behave assertively is central to developing a stronger self-esteem.

Building self-esteem

People with anxiety disorder often have low self-esteem. Feeling worthless can make the anxiety worse in many ways. It can trigger a passive style of interacting with others and foster a fear of being judged harshly. Low self-esteem may also be related to the impact of the anxiety disorder on your life. These problems may include:

- isolation
- feelings of shame and guilt
- depressed mood
- difficulties in functioning at school, work or in social situations.

The good news is you can take steps to learn about and improve yourself-esteem. Community support organizations and counseling may help you to cope with these problems.

Structured problem solving

Some people with anxiety disorders are 'worriers', who fret about a problem rather than actively solve it. Learning how to break down a problem into its various components – and then decide on a course of action – is a valuable skill that can help manage generalized anxiety and depression. This is known as **structured problem solving**.

Medication

It is important that medications are seen as a short-term measure, rather than the solution to anxiety disorders.

Research studies have shown that psychological therapies, such as cognitive behavior therapy, are much more effective than medications in managing anxiety disorders in the long term. Your doctor may prescribe a brief course of tranquilizers or antidepressants to help you deal with your symptoms while other treatment options are given a chance to take effect.

Support groups and education

Support groups allow people with anxiety to meet in comfort and safety, and give and receive support. They also provide the opportunity to learn more about anxiety and to develop social networks.

Get more physical activity

If you're stressed, moving your body consistently may help reduce stress levels and improve mood. A 6-week study of 185 university students found that participating in aerobic exercise 2 days per week significantly reduced overall perceived stress and perceived stress due to uncertainty. Plus, the exercise routine significantly improved self-reported depression. Regular exercise has been shown to improve symptoms of common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. If you're currently inactive, start with gentle activities such as walking or biking. Choosing an

activity that you enjoy may help increase your chances of sticking to it in the long term.

Eat a balanced diet

Your diet affects every aspect of your health, including your mental health. A 2022 review of research suggests that people who follow a diet high in ultra-processed foods and added sugar are more likely to experience higher perceived stress levels. Being chronically stressed may lead you to overeat and reach for highly palatable foods, which may harm your overall health and mood. Not eating enough nutrient-dense whole foods may increase your risk of deficiencies in nutrients essential for regulating stress and mood, such as magnesium and B vitamins. Minimizing your intake of highly processed foods and beverages and eating more whole foods can help ensure your body is properly nourished. In turn, this may improve your resilience to stress. Whole food options can include:

- vegetables
- fruits
- beans
- fish
- nuts
- Seeds

Minimize phone use and screen time

While smartphones, computers, and tablets are often necessary, using them too often may increase stress levels. A 2021 review of literature points out that several studies have linked excessive smartphone use with increased stress levels and mental health disorders. Spending too much time in front of screens is associated with lower psychological well-being and increased stress levels in adults and kids. Furthermore, screen time may negatively affect sleep, which may also lead to increased stress levels.

Practice self-care

Setting aside time to practice self-care may help reduce your stress levels. Practical examples include:

- going for a walk outside
- taking a bath
- lighting candles
- reading a good book
- exercising
- preparing a healthy meal
- stretching before bed
- getting a massage
- practicing a hobby
- using a diffuser with calming scents

- practicing yoga

People who engage in self-care typically have lower levels of stress and improved quality of life, while a lack of self-care is associated with a higher risk of stress and burnout. Taking time for yourself is essential to live a healthy life. This is especially important for people who tend to be highly stressed, including nurses, doctors, teachers, and caretakers. Self-care doesn't have to be elaborate or complicated. It simply means tending to your well-being and happiness. Exposure to certain scents via candles or essential oils may be especially calming. Here are a few relaxing scents:

- lavender
- rose
- vetiver
- bergamot
- Roman chamomile
- neroli
- frankincense
- sandalwood
- ylang-ylang
- orange or orange blossom
- geranium

Using scents to boost your mood is called aromatherapy. Aromatherapy can decrease anxiety and improve sleep.

Try journaling

Journaling may help reduce stress and anxiety and provide a positive outlet for your thoughts and emotions. A 2018 study noted that expressive writing or therapeutic writing can benefit people managing chronic health conditions, including but not limited to mental health conditions like depression. They noted that regular journaling may be linked to a higher quality of life, more proactive self-care behaviors, and other healthful behaviors, such as taking prescribed medications. You can also try a guided journal if you'd prefer more targeted, expressive writing.

Reduce your caffeine intake

Caffeine is a chemical in coffee, tea, chocolate, and energy drinks that stimulates your central nervous system. Consuming too much may worsen anxiety, according to a 2021 review of literature on the subject. Overconsumption may also harm your sleep. In turn, this may increase stress and anxiety symptoms. People have different thresholds for how much caffeine they can tolerate. If caffeine makes you jittery or anxious, consider cutting back by replacing coffee or energy drinks with decaffeinated coffee, herbal tea, or water. Although coffee has health benefits in moderation, it's recommended to keep caffeine intake under 400 mg daily, which equals 4–5 cups (0.9–1.2 L) of coffee. Still, people sensitive to caffeine may experience increased anxiety and stress after consuming less caffeine than this, so it's important to consider your tolerance.

Spend time with friends and family

Social support from friends and family may help you get through stressful times and cope with stress. One 2019 study in 163 Latinx college-age young adults associated lower levels of support from friends, family, and romantic partners with loneliness, depressive symptoms, and perceived stress. Having a social support system is important for your overall mental health. If you're feeling alone and don't have friends or family to depend on, social support groups may help. Consider joining a club or sports team or volunteering for a cause that's important to you.

Create boundaries and learn to say no

Not all stressors are within your control, but some are. Putting too much on your plate may increase your stress load and limit the amount of time you can spend on self-care. One way to help reduce stress and protect your mental health may be to say “no” more often. This is especially true if you take on more than you can handle because juggling many responsibilities may leave you feeling overwhelmed. Being selective about what you take on — and saying “no” to things that will unnecessarily add to your load — can reduce your stress levels. Creating boundaries — especially with people who add to your stress levels — is a healthy way to protect your well-being. This can be as simple as asking a friend or family member not to stop by unannounced or canceling standing plans with a friend if you need more space.

Avoid procrastination

Another way to take control of your stress is to stay on top of your priorities and avoid procrastinating when you aren't feeling stressed. Procrastination may harm your productivity and leave you scrambling to catch up. This can cause stress, which negatively affects your health and sleep quality. It's also true that you may be more likely to procrastinate in times of stress as a coping mechanism. A study in 140 medical students in China linked procrastination to increased stress levels. The study also associated procrastination and delayed stress reactions with more negative parenting styles, including punishment and rejection. If you find yourself procrastinating regularly, it may be helpful to make a to-do list organized by priority. Give yourself realistic deadlines and work your way down the list. Sometimes, adding an item to the list may help you feel better about it, even if it doesn't get done immediately. Work on the things that need to get done today, and give yourself chunks of uninterrupted time. Switching between tasks or multitasking can be stressful in itself.

Take a yoga class

Yoga has become a popular method of stress relief and exercise among all age groups. While yoga styles differ, most share a common goal — to join your body and mind by increasing body and breath awareness. Research shows that yoga helps reduce stress and anxiety. Plus, it can promote psychological well-being. These benefits seem related to yoga's effect on your nervous system and stress response.

Yoga may help lower cortisol levels, blood pressure, and heart rate while increasing levels of gamma aminobutyric acid, a neurotransmitter that's low in people with mood disorders.

Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness describes practices that anchor you to the present moment. Stress reduction techniques that utilize mindfulness include meditation and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), a type of cognitive behavioral therapy. Meditating consistently, even for short periods, may help boost your mood and decrease symptoms of stress and anxiety. Countless books, apps, and websites can teach you the basics if you want to try meditation. There may also be therapists in your area who specialize in MBCT.

Cuddle

Human touch may have a calming effect and help you better cope with stress. For example, studies show positive physical contact may help relieve stress and loneliness. These types of contact may help release oxytocin and lower cortisol. In turn, these effects help lower blood pressure and heart rate. Both high blood pressure and increased heart rate are physical symptoms of stress.

Spend time in nature

Spending more time outside may help reduce stress. Studies show that spending time in green spaces such as parks and forests and being immersed in nature are healthy ways to manage stress. A review of 14 studies found that spending as little as 10 minutes in a natural setting may help improve psychological and physiological markers of mental well-being, including perceived stress and happiness, in college-aged people. Hiking and camping are great options, but some people don't enjoy — or have access to — these activities. Even in an urban area, you can seek out green spaces such as local parks, arboretums, and botanical gardens.

Practice deep breathing

Mental stress activates your sympathetic nervous system, sending your body into fight-or-flight mode. During this reaction, stress hormones trigger physical symptoms such as a faster heartbeat, quicker breathing, and constricted blood vessels. Deep breathing exercises may help activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the relaxation response. Deep breathing exercises include:

- diaphragmatic breathing
- alternate nostril breathing
- box breathing
- paced respiration

Deep breathing aims to focus your awareness on your breath, making it slower and deeper. When you breathe in deeply through your nose, your lungs fully expand, and your belly rises. This helps slow your heart rate, allowing you to feel at peace.

Spend time with a pet

Having a pet may help reduce stress and improve your mood. When you cuddle or touch your pet, your body releases oxytocin — a hormone linked to a positive mood.

Plus, research shows that pet owners — especially those with dogs — tend to have greater life satisfaction, better self-esteem, reduced levels of loneliness and anxiety, and more positive moods. Having a pet may also help relieve stress by giving you purpose, keeping you active, and providing companionship.

Consider supplements

Several vitamins and minerals play an important role in your body's stress response and mood regulation. As such, a deficiency in one or more nutrients may affect your mental health and ability to cope with stress. Some studies show that certain dietary supplements may help reduce stress and improve mood. For example, your magnesium levels may deplete when you're chronically stressed. Since this mineral plays an important role in your body's stress response, you may want to ensure you're getting enough each day. Supplementing with magnesium has been shown to improve stress in chronically stressed people. Other supplements, including Rhodiola, ashwagandha, B vitamins, and L-theanine, may also help reduce stress,

though more research is needed to understand their potential benefits better.

However, dietary supplements may not be appropriate or safe for everyone. Consult a healthcare professional if you're interested in using supplements to help relieve stress.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Method

The 54321 (or 5, 4, 3, 2, 1) method is a grounding exercise designed to manage acute stress and reduce anxiety. It involves identifying 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. By doing so, it helps shift your focus from anxiety-provoking thoughts to the present moment.

The 5-sense method is essentially another name for the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 technique. It leverages the power of your five senses—sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste—to redirect your attention away from distressing thoughts and emotions. By focusing on sensory experiences, the method aims to ground you in the here and now.

The 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method works because it engages multiple senses, requiring you to concentrate on the present environment rather than dwell on anxiety-inducing thoughts. This interrupts the fight or flight response, calming the nervous system and reducing symptoms of anxiety or stress almost immediately. Moreover, it can serve as the first step toward long-term coping strategies for mental wellness.

Social situations can often be overwhelming and may trigger social anxiety. Using the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 technique helps to ground and calm you, enabling you to be more present in social interactions.

Besides its immediate calming effects, practicing the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 technique regularly can improve your overall emotional regulation and make you feel more grounded during a multitude of situations in life. This is because the exercise empowers you to take control of your mental state so you feel confident to confront and handle emotional challenges.

3 - 3 - 3 Rule

The 3-3-3 rule is another grounding technique aimed at reducing anxiety. In this method, you identify 3 things you can see, 3 things you can touch, and then take 3 deep breaths. While it's less comprehensive than the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method, it serves a similar purpose—providing quick relief from acute anxiety by refocusing your attention on the present moment. In the end, choose whatever method works best for you.

Diaphragmatic breathing

What it is: Consciously controlling an automatic process

How to do it: Close your eyes and pull as much air as you can into your lungs. Try to take in enough so that your belly actually pokes out. Hold your breath for a couple of

beats, then let it out as slowly as possible. Try to breathe out as much air as you can by tightening your abdominal muscles.

Why it works: “The slower you exhale, the more you’ll engage the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for calming the body down after it’s had a bad fright or shock,” says Wygant. “You can’t be both scared and calm all at once, so focus on lengthening your exhale to get the most out of it. The long exhale is what tells your body everything is OK.”

Simple stretches

What they are: Releasing tension with movements you can do almost anywhere

How to do them: Gently press the tip of your tongue to the roof of mouth, and your jaw will often fall open and relax on its own. Tilt your head forward and roll it around slowly on your neck clockwise, then counterclockwise. Raise your eyebrows up and down a few times to loosen your facial muscles. Shrug your shoulders as if saying, “I don’t know,” then leave them up high for a few seconds before letting them fall.

Why they work: “People carry so much tension in their jaw, neck and shoulders and don’t even realize it,” notes Wygant. “But as psychologist Dr. Therese Rando once said, ‘If you can relax your body, you can relax your mind.’”

Use your words

What it is: Describing strong feelings verbally

How to do it: Ask yourself questions that force the analytical parts of your brain to engage. “What emotion am I feeling right now? Is it anger? Fear? Rage? Why am I feeling this way? Is it because of something that’s already happened or something that I’m only afraid *might* happen?”

Why it works: “Post-traumatic stress disorder studies show that some people take longer than usual to perceive a threat has diminished,” notes Wygant. “But when they’re asked to label or describe their emotions, it engages the prefrontal cortex in their brain and helps calm them down. Then, they can recognize, ‘Oh, that’s just a stick, not a snake.’”

Guided imagery

What it is: Using your imagination to induce feelings of well-being and safety

How to do it: Think of a person, place or thing that brings you joy or comfort, and picture it in your mind in as much detail as possible. If it’s the ocean, for instance, smell the salt water, watch the seagulls flying overhead, feel the warmth of the sand beneath your toes, and hear the waves crashing on the beach. If it’s the symphony, admire the beautiful grain of varnished wood on a violin, feel the smooth velvet of a seat cushion, and hear the bright, cheerful blasts of a trumpet. Then take five slow, cleansing breaths, and with each one, imagine yourself inhaling love, peace, and comfort, and exhaling fear, worry, and tension.

Why it works: “Studies show that people’s bodies can respond in the same way from seeing or envisioning an activity as they would from performing it themselves,”

explains Wygant. “Triathletes, for instance, showed increased brain activity and heart rates while just watching videos of other triathletes competing.”

Change your language

What it is: Using a second language to redirect the brain

How to do it: If you speak more than one language — including American Sign Language — contact someone you know who also speaks one of your secondary languages and make small talk with them. Or, watch a TV show, listen to a radio broadcast, or read a book or news website in your non-native tongue.

Why it works: “When you switch languages, a different part of the brain has to take over,” explains Wygant. “That shifts your focus away from emotions.”

Lose yourself in music

What it is: Using music as a distraction

How to do it: “Changing the language” also applies to music, because making music activates a different part of your brain. So, if you have an instrument available and know how to use it, take a few minutes to practice a song or two. Or, if you’re not in a place where you can do that, imagine yourself playing one of your favorite pieces instead, and really savor the experience.

Why it works: “Playing music just gives your brain a reprieve,” explains Wygant. “During finals in school, I remember students lining up for the chance to play the piano in one of our lobbies. Because when you’re making music, you’re not thinking

about anatomy or organic chemistry. And afterward, you can just think much more clearly and solve problems a whole lot better.”

Make a new playlist

What it is: Creating a new music collection on a smartphone, tablet or computer

How to do it: Start with three of your favorite songs right now. Then add three more songs you liked last year, or back in college or during high school or as a kid. Keep going as long as you wish, or until you have a collection that feels complete.

Why it works: “Music relaxes people,” says Wygant. “It’s as simple as that. And when the memories and feelings elicited by certain songs are very happy, they completely distract you. The mind cannot focus on two different things at once. So, change the channel and get yourself off the worry station.”

EFT Tapping

EFT tapping focuses on tapping the 12 meridian points of the body to relieve symptoms of a negative experience or emotion.

What is EFT tapping?

Emotional freedom technique (EFT) is an alternative treatment for physical pain and emotional distress. It’s also referred to as tapping or psychological acupressure.

People who use this technique believe tapping the body can create a balance in your energy system and treat pain. According to its developer, Gary Craig, a disruption in energy is the cause of all negative emotions and pain.

Though still being researched, EFT tapping has been used to treat people with anxiety and people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

How does EFT tapping work?

Similar to acupuncture, EFT focuses on the meridian points — or energy hot spots — to restore balance to your body's energy. It's believed that restoring this energy balance can relieve symptoms a negative experience or emotion may have caused.

Based on Chinese medicine, meridian points are thought of as areas of the body energy flows through. These pathways help balance energy flow to maintain your health. Any imbalance can influence disease or sickness.

Acupuncture uses needles to apply pressure to these energy points. EFT uses fingertip tapping to apply pressure.

Proponents say the tapping helps you access your body's energy and send signals to the part of the brain that controls stress. They claim that stimulating the meridian points through EFT tapping can reduce the stress or negative emotion you feel from your issue, ultimately restoring balance to your disrupted energy.

EFT tapping in 5 steps

EFT tapping can be divided into five steps. If you have more than one issue or fear, you can repeat this sequence to address it and reduce or eliminate the intensity of your negative feeling.

1. Identify the issue

In order for this technique to be effective, you must first identify the issue or fear you have. This will be your focal point while you're tapping. Focusing on only one problem at a time is purported to enhance your outcome.

2. Test the initial intensity

After you identify your problem area, you need to set a benchmark level of intensity. The intensity level is rated on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being the worst or most difficult. The scale assesses the emotional or physical pain and discomfort you feel from your focal issue.

Establishing a benchmark helps you monitor your progress after performing a complete EFT sequence. If your initial intensity was 10 prior to tapping and ended at 5, you'd have accomplished a 50 percent improvement level.

3. The setup

Prior to tapping, you need to establish a phrase that explains what you're trying to address. It must focus on two main goals:

- acknowledging the issues
- accepting yourself despite the problem

The common setup phrase is: "Even though I have this [fear or problem], I deeply and completely accept myself."

You can alter this phrase so that it fits your problem, but it must not address someone else's. For example, you can't say, "Even though my mother is sick, I deeply and completely accept myself." You have to focus on how the problem makes you feel in order to relieve the distress it causes.

It's better to address this situation by saying, "Even though I'm sad my mother is sick, I deeply and completely accept myself."

4. EFT tapping sequence

The EFT tapping sequence is the methodic tapping on the ends of nine meridian points.

There are 12 major meridians that mirror each side of the body and correspond to an internal organ. However, EFT mainly focuses on these nine:

- side of hand, sometimes referred to as “karate chop” (KC): small intestine meridian
- top of head (TH): governing vessel
- eyebrow (EB): bladder meridian
- side of the eye (SE): gallbladder meridian
- under the eye (UE): stomach meridian
- under the nose (UN): governing vessel
- chin (Ch): central vessel
- beginning of the collarbone (CB): kidney meridian
- under the arm (UA): spleen meridian

Begin by tapping the side of the hand point while simultaneously reciting your setup phrase three times. Then, tap each following point seven times, moving down the body in this ascending order:

- eyebrow
- side of the eye
- under the eye
- under the nose
- chin
- beginning of the collarbone
- under the arm

After tapping the underarm point, finish the sequence at the top of the head point.

While tapping the ascending points, recite a reminder phrase to maintain focus on your problem area. If your setup phrase is, “Even though I’m sad my mother is sick, I deeply and completely accept myself,” your reminder phrase can be, “The sadness I feel that my mother is sick.”

Recite this phrase at each tapping point. Repeat this sequence two or three times.

5. Test the final intensity

At the end of your sequence, rate your intensity level on a scale from 0 to 10. Compare your results with your initial intensity level. If you haven’t reached 0, repeat this process until you do.

Does EFT tapping work?

EFT has been used to effectively treat war veterans and active military with PTSD. In a 2013 study, researchers studied the impact of EFT tapping on veterans with PTSD against those receiving standard care.

Within a month, participants receiving EFT coaching sessions had significantly reduced their psychological stress. In addition, more than half of the EFT test group no longer fit the criteria for PTSD.

There are also some success stories from people with anxiety using EFT tapping as an alternative treatment.

A 2016 review compared the effectiveness of using EFT tapping over standard care options for anxiety symptoms.

A 2022 study found EFT to be effective in increasing self-esteem in nurses. Another study in 2023 showed that EFT reduced anxiety and stress for health care professionals during COVID-19.

The study concluded there was a significant decrease in anxiety scores compared to participants receiving other care. However, further research is needed to compare EFT treatment with other cognitive therapy techniques.

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Emergency Resources

988 Suicide & Crisis Hotline

<https://988lifeline.org/>

call or text: **988**

- *The 988 Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States. We're committed to improving crisis services and advancing suicide prevention by empowering individuals, advancing professional best practices, and building awareness.*

National Domestic Violence Hotline

<https://www.thehotline.org/>

call: **1(800)799-SAFE** or text: **"START"** to **88788**

National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline

<https://rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline>

call: **1(800)656-HOPE**

Calling the National Sexual Assault Hotline gives you access to a range of free services including:

- *Confidential support from a trained staff member*

- *Support finding a local health facility that is trained to care for survivors of sexual assault and offers services like sexual assault forensic exams*
- *Someone to help you talk through what happened*
- *Local resources that can assist with your next steps toward healing and recovery*
- *Referrals for long term support in your area*
- *Information about the laws in your community*
- *Basic information about medical concerns*

National Human Trafficking Hotline

<https://polarisproject.org/direct-response/>

call: **1(888)373-7888** or text: **"HELP"** to **233733**

Office for Victims of Crime

<https://ovc.ojp.gov/help-for-victims/toll-free-text-and-online-hotlines>

American Psychological Association

<https://www.apa.org/topics/crisis-hotlines>

Crisis Text Line

<https://www.crisistextline.org/>

text: **"HOME"** to **741741**

- *First, you're in a crisis. Crisis doesn't just mean thinking about ending your own life. It's any painful emotion and anytime you need support. So, you reach out to a volunteer Crisis Counselor.*

Your opening message can say anything. Keywords like "HOME," "START" and "HELLO" just help us identify how people hear about us.

- *The first two responses are automated. They tell you that you're being connected with a Crisis Counselor and invite you to share a bit more.*
The Crisis Counselor is a trained volunteer, not a professional. They can provide support, but not medical advice.

- *It usually takes less than five minutes to connect you with a Crisis Counselor. (It may take longer during high-traffic times).*

When you've reached a Crisis Counselor, they'll introduce themselves, reflect on what you've said, and invite you to share at your own pace.

- *You'll then message back and forth with the Crisis Counselor. You never have to share anything you don't want to.*

- *The Crisis Counselor will help you sort through your feelings by asking questions, empathizing, and actively listening.*

- *The conversation typically ends when you and the Crisis Counselor both feel comfortable deciding that you're in a "cool," safe place.*

After the conversation, you'll receive an optional survey about your experience. This helps us help you and others like you!

- *The goal of any conversation is to get you to a calm, safe place.*

Sometimes that means providing you with a referral to further help, and sometimes it just means being there and listening. A conversation usually lasts anywhere from 15-45 minutes.

Psychiatric Care

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