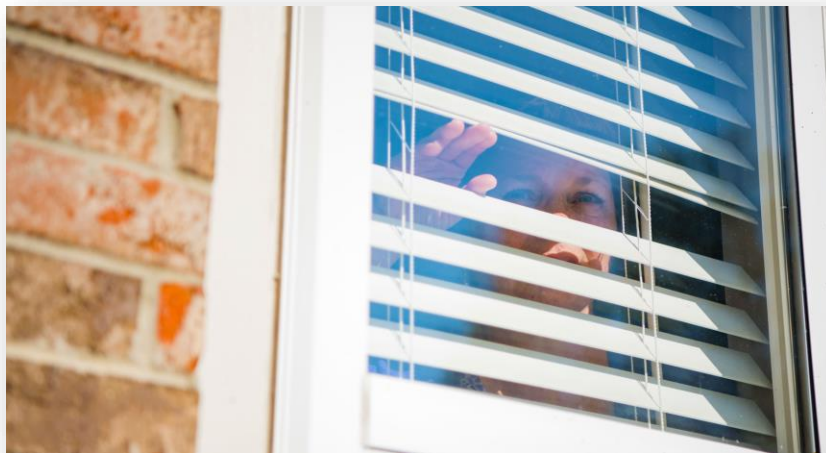


# January Health Tip

Health Ministries

## Coming to Terms with Anxiety

Anxiety is that feeling of uncertainty or dread we get before a big interview, meeting a future in-law or presenting at an important meeting. If your temporary worry becomes a common theme of fear and nervousness that disrupts the flow of your life, you may have an anxiety disorder. About 40 million American adults each year suffer from anxiety disorders, says the *Anxiety and Depression Association of America*. Children and teens also have anxiety disorders, often starting around age 6. From age 13 to 18, about 8 percent of teens experience symptoms. Women are twice as



likely as men to have an anxiety disorder. You typically feel dread or extreme concern that is out of proportion to the situation or not appropriate to your age if you have an anxiety disorder. Additionally, your anxiety disrupts how you function in daily life and causes you to avoid certain activities or places.

### Signs of Anxiety Disorder Include:

- Feelings of fear or dread of a situation or object that occur regularly and continue over weeks and months (for example, fear of crowds, obsessive thoughts, worry that paralyzes you and keeps you from taking action)
- Avoidance of activities that bring you face to face with a dreaded object or situation or performing rituals you can't seem to control
- One or more physical symptoms, including weakness, shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, chest pain, muscle tension, nausea, dizziness or upset stomach

Here are five ways (other than medication) that may help you to face your fears and reduce their power in your life:

- **Talk Therapy:** Also called *psychotherapy*, talk therapy is a way of talking through your anxiety and fear with a trained professional. It may be uncomfortable at first but facing your fears with someone who can support and guide you helps you move beyond those fears to live more fully. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a specific type of talk therapy in which you train your mind to think differently about your fears. This can lead to reduced reactions to situations that cause you anxiety and new behaviors that help you overcome excessive worry, fear or panic. It may include techniques for relaxing or practicing social skills.

You may work with a psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker on identifying, challenging and neutralizing unhelpful thoughts that are the foundation of your disorder. Your mental health provider may also encourage you to engage in activities you have been avoiding.

Usually, talk therapy is conducted one on one, but it can be helpful to talk in groups, especially if you have anxieties focused on being around other people.



- **Self-Help or Support Groups:** Consider joining a self-help or support group and sharing your problems, stresses and achievements with others. This can be especially helpful if a trained expert facilitates the group. You may like the idea of an internet chat room, but be cautious about any advice you receive from people you don't really know. Talking with a trusted friend or church leader may be helpful, although they should not be a substitute for a trained professional.
- **Stress Management Strategies:** Stress management techniques, including guided imagery or meditation, can help you calm yourself and keep fears from escalating. Breathing exercises or physical activity such as walking also may calm you.
- **Yoga:** This complementary therapy can vary from instructor to instructor, but it commonly includes physical stretching and balancing postures, breathing exercises and meditation. Its underlying philosophy of personal peace and calm provides some relief for many people with anxiety.
- **Acupuncture:** Evidence is becoming stronger that acupuncture is helpful in treating anxiety disorders. The traditional Chinese practice requires inserting hair-thin needles into the body at specific points to open blockages to the body's energy flow.

If you believe you might have an anxiety disorder, consult with your primary care physician right away for a diagnosis and to discuss the best treatment plan for you.

Source: American Psychiatric Association; WomensHealth.gov; National Institutes of Health; Mental Health America

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