

What's the difference between normal anxiety and anxiety disorder?

Normal anxiety	Anxiety disorder
Occasional worry about circumstantial events, such as an exam or breakup, that may leave you upset.	Constant, chronic, and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress, disturbs your social life, and interferes with classes and work.
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in the face of an uncomfortable social situation.	Avoidance of common social situations for fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated.
Random cases of "nerves" or jitters; dizziness or sweating over an exam, presentation, or other important event.	Repeated, random panic attacks or persistent worry and anticipation of another panic attack and feelings of terror or impending doom.
Realistic fear of a threatening object, place, or situation.	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger.
Wanting to feel confident that you are healthy and living in a safe, hazard-free environment.	Performing uncontrollable, repetitive actions, such as washing your hands repeatedly or checking things over and over.
Anxiety, sadness, or difficulty sleeping immediately following a traumatic event.	Ongoing and recurring nightmares, flashbacks, or emotional numbing relating to a traumatic event in your life that occurred several months or years ago.

See yourself? If you can relate to any of these anxiety disorder descriptions, talk to someone who can help as soon as possible.

Stress Reduction Tips

Whether you have normal anxiety or an anxiety disorder, these strategies will help you cope:

Exercise. Physical activity helps your body and mind. Go to the gym. Go for a walk. Do yoga. Play Frisbee. Just get moving!

Eat a balanced diet. Don't skip meals. Try to eat from all of the food groups, and try to stay away from caffeine (minimize soda, energy drinks, and coffee). Caffeine can trigger anxiety and panic attacks.

Limit alcohol and stay away from illegal drugs. Alcohol and drugs aggravate anxiety and can cause panic attacks.

Get involved. Being active in your community creates a support network and gives you a break from your everyday stress.

Do your best instead of trying to be perfect. We all know perfection isn't possible, so be proud of however close you get.

Take a time-out. Take a deep breath and count to 10. Stepping back from a problem lets you clear your head. Do yoga. Meditate. Get a massage. Learn relaxation techniques. Listen to music.

Put things in perspective. Think about your situation. Ask yourself whether it's really as bad as you think it is or if you may be focusing on limited information or evidence.

Talk to someone. Don't bottle up emotions to the verge of explosion. Reach out to your friends, roommate, partner, family, or a counselor when you're feeling overwhelmed.

Find out what triggers your anxiety. Take notes or write in a journal when you're feeling anxious or stressed, and then look for patterns.

School can be stressful!

Between school, work, family, friends, and every day (and unusual!) life events, you are pulled in different directions. Moreover, all of these responsibilities take away from the time you might need to care for yourself, so it's easy to see how you might become anxious.

Anxiety is a normal reaction to life-changing events. While we all get stressed out or anxious at times, most of us bounce back. But anxiety that is so frequent, intense, and uncontrollable that it hinders daily routines may be a sign of an anxiety disorder.

Treating anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorder treatment may involve therapy or medication or a combination of both. The good news is treatment works! With time and patience, up to 90 percent of people who obtain proper care from a health professional will recover and live full and productive lives.

It is important to get help **NOW**. An untreated anxiety disorder may lead to academic problems, secondary conditions such as substance abuse or depression, and - in extreme cases - suicide. Early treatment can help prevent these problems.

Or you may choose to see your family physician, who may be able to treat you or recommend a psychiatrist, psychologist, clinical social worker, counselor, or psychiatric nurse. Regardless of where you seek treatment, it's crucial that you are comfortable with who is treating you and how you are being treated.

Helping a friend or loved one

If someone close to you has an anxiety disorder, here's how you can help:

Learn about the disorder. Understanding what he is going through will help you give support, and keep your own worry under control. The Anxiety Disorders Association of America (www.adaa.org) provides information and can help you find a therapist.

Recognize and accept stressful periods. Modify your expectations of how she should act and be sure to be extra supportive during difficult times.

Everyone experiences anxiety differently. Be tolerant, supportive, and nonjudgmental.

Be encouraging and don't get discouraged. Give praise for even small accomplishments. Stay positive.

Talk to someone. Being consistently supportive can be difficult, so make sure you have someone - a roommate, friend, partner, family member, or counselor - to support you.

Based on original content developed by the Anxiety Disorders Association of America. You can find more information at <http://www.adaa.org/>.