

# Anxiety

## Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

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### What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear over something. You may feel on edge or tense. This normal response to stress or new situations becomes a problem when it lasts for a long time, is very strong, or keeps you from performing your normal activities. Anxiety may affect your family, friends, work, or school life. You may have problems with sleeping, eating, and overall health.

### What are symptoms of severe anxiety?

People with severe anxiety feel very worried or "on edge" much of the time. They can have trouble sleeping or forget things. Plus, they can have physical symptoms. For instance, people with severe anxiety often feel very tired and have tense muscles. Some even get stomach aches or feel chest tightness.

### What helps to manage anxiety?

There are various non-medication and medication options to treat anxiety. There is no reason to feel embarrassed about getting treatment for anxiety. Anxiety is a common problem affecting all kinds of people. Keep in mind that it might take a little while to find the right treatment. People respond in different ways to medicines and therapy, so you might need to try a few approaches before you find the one that helps you most. The key is to not give up and to let your provider know how you feel along the way. Call Health Services (HS) or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

for a consultation appointment to get more information

### Non-medication options:

- Stress reduction: using relaxation methods like meditation, deep breathing, and muscle relaxation.
- Improving sleep: most adults require 7-9 hours of sleep a night with at least 6 hours of continuous sleep. Deep (REM) sleep is responsible for consolidating newly learned information and occurs after 6 hours of continuous sleep.
- Exercise: Aerobic exercise, weight lifting, yoga and tai chi can be helpful
- Talk to a mental health professional: to discuss feelings, relationships, and worries. You may find new ways of thinking about your situation so that you feel less anxious. In therapy, you might also learn new skills to reduce anxiety
- Talking to a friend, team mate or family member

### Medication options

**Daily medications:** such as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)

Although SSRIs are commonly called "antidepressants," this type of medication is used to treat a variety of conditions including depression, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

- SSRIs are the first-line medications for treating depression & anxiety
- In general, these medications can help improve your mood and make it easier to do everyday tasks.
- Commonly prescribed SSRIs include:
  - Sertraline (brand name Zoloft)
  - Escitalopram (brand name Lexapro)

**As needed medications:** such as beta blockers, benzodiazepines  
 These medications are taken prior to anxiety provoking events or during times of increased anxiety.

**How do I take this medication safely?**  
 Take your medication as prescribed by your provider. It might help to have a pill box or reminder to take your medication at the same time every day to prevent missing or repeating doses. If you are experiencing side effects, worsening depression, or suicidal thoughts please call your provider, or 911 immediately.

**Are there herbal medications available?**  
 Makers of herbal drugs sometimes claim that their products relieve anxiety. For example, herbs called kava kava and valerian are sold as treatments for anxiety. But there is no evidence that these treatments work. What's more, kava kava has been linked with serious liver damage. It might not be safe.

**Will it always be this way?**  
 People with anxiety disorders often have to deal with some anxiety for the rest of their life. Anxiety can come and go, increasing during times of stress. The good news is,

many people find effective treatments or ways to deal with their anxiety.

**Additional resources:**  
**Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS), 401-863-3476**  
 Clinicians provide confidential mental health support, follow-up appointments, and 24 hour on-call services.  
**Health Services (HS), 401-863-1330** Confidential medical care, testing and treatment  
**Office of the Chaplains & Religious Life, 401-863-2344**  
 Chaplains can provide counseling and support.  
**Student Support Services, 401-863-3145**  
 The Deans can help with personal concerns impacting their college experience  
**Suicide & Crisis lifeline**-Call or Text 988  
**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – Call 800-273-TALK (8255)  
**Crisis Text Line** – Text HOME to 741-741  
 Connect with a trained crisis counselor to receive free, 24/7 crisis support via text message.  
**Bwell Health Promotion**  
<https://www.brown.edu/bwell>  
**Mindfulness Center at Brown**  
<https://www.brown.edu/public-health/mindfulness/home>