

Some surprisingly good news about anxiety

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Anxiety disorders are the most common type of psychiatric illness, yet researchers know very little about factors associated with recovery. A new University of Toronto study investigated three levels of recovery in a large, representative sample of more than 2,000 Canadians with a history of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD).

The study reports that 72% of Canadians with a history of GAD have been free of the [mental health condition](#) for at least one year. Overall, 40% were in a state of excellent mental health, and almost 60% had no other [mental illness](#) or addiction issues, such as suicidal thoughts, substance dependence, a [major depressive disorder](#) or a bipolar disorder, in the past year,

The definition of excellent mental health sets a very high bar. To be defined in excellent mental health, respondents had to achieve three things: 1) almost daily happiness or [life satisfaction](#) in the past month, 2) high levels of social and psychological well-being in the past month, and 3) freedom from [generalized anxiety disorder](#) and depressive [disorders](#), suicidal thoughts and substance dependence for at least the preceding full year.

"We were so encouraged to learn that even among those whose [anxiety disorders](#) had lasted a decade or longer, half had been in remission from GAD for the past year and one-quarter had achieved excellent mental health and well-being," says Esme Fuller-Thomson, lead author of the study. Fuller-Thomson is Director of the University of Toronto's Institute for Life Course and Aging and Professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and the Department of Family & Community Medicine.

"This research provides a very hopeful message for individuals struggling with [anxiety](#), their families and health professionals. Our findings suggest that full recovery is possible, even among those who have suffered for many years with the disorder," she says.

Individuals who had at least one person in their lives who provided them with a sense of emotional security and wellbeing were three times more likely to be in excellent mental health than those without a confidant.

"For those with anxiety disorders, the social support that extends from a confidant can foster a sense of belonging and self-worth which may promote recovery" says co-author Kandace Ryckman, a recent graduate of University of Toronto's Masters of Public Health.

In addition, those who turned to their religious or [spiritual beliefs](#) to cope with everyday difficulties had 36% higher odds of excellent mental health than those who did not use spiritual coping. "Other researchers have also found a strong link between recovery from mental illness and belief in a higher power," reports Fuller-Thomson.

The researchers found that poor physical health, functional limitations, insomnia and a history of depression were impediments to excellent mental health in the sample.

"Health professionals who are treating individuals with anxiety disorders need to consider their patients' physical health problems and social isolation in their treatment plans" says Ryckman.

The researchers examined a nationally representative sample of 2,128 Canadian community-dwelling adults who had a generalized anxiety disorder at some point in their lives. The data were drawn from Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey-Mental Health. This research was published online ahead of press this week in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*.

More information: Michael Cronquist Christensen et al, Efficacy of vortioxetine in patients with major depressive disorder reporting childhood or recent trauma, *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2019.11.074](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.11.074)

Provided by University of Toronto

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