

How to deal with anxiety

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It's natural for everyone to experience anxiety at different times in their lives. Maybe you're worried about making a good first impression with your new partner's family, and you become anxious in the days leading

up to the meeting about what you'll wear.

Being anxious even has its benefits, according to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI). It can keep you alert when you're behind the wheel during a snowstorm, for example, or help you better prepare for a work presentation.

Yet, for over 40 million Americans, anxiety has affected so much of their lives that it's considered a [mental health](#) disorder. When that happens, it can have major emotional, physical and mental impacts on your health, so learning how to deal with it is important.

Here are some science-based, evidence-backed tips on how to deal with anxiety when it pops up, including easy self-care ideas. In addition, [anxiety medications](#) are available to help you manage and control your [anxiety symptoms](#).

What is anxiety?

According to NAMI, anxiety may be considered a disorder when fear or worry prevents you from accomplishing everyday activities. It includes several disorders. Among them are generalized anxiety disorder, phobias, [social anxiety disorder](#) and panic disorder.

While the exact causes of anxiety disorders aren't known, several factors are thought to play a role, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#). These include a family history of anxiety, trauma during childhood or adulthood, certain personality traits, other mental health issues like depression, and health conditions like thyroid disorders and heart arrhythmias.

Anxiety symptoms

While each anxiety disorder has its symptoms, NAMI states that the one characteristic they all share is an irrational or excessive fear of a threat, despite the situation holding no real threat.

People with anxiety may also experience:

- Shortness of breath
- Pounding heartbeat
- Feelings of overwhelm or dread
- Fatigue and insomnia
- Anticipating that the worst will happen
- Feeling restless
- Shaking (tremors) and sweating
- Stomach upset and diarrhea
- Frequent urination
- Irritability

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George Mason University [clinical psychologist James Maddux](#) counsels people with anxiety using a type of therapy called [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) (CBT). It aims to help people identify counterproductive thinking, which can add to anxiety by negatively impacting how you feel.

Maddux utilizes CBT because it "tries to help the person understand what those [counterproductive] patterns of thinking are and to change those patterns of thinking."

Here are five easy self-care strategies Maddux recommends for helping you deal with bouts of anxiety:

- **Think about your options:** "A question I may ask [my client is] 'give me an example recently of where the anxiety ... got in the

way of you accomplishing what you were trying to accomplish," Maddux said. He explained the next step would be to ask yourself, "If the situation comes up again, what might you do differently, what might you think differently?" He revealed that this helps you interrupt the counterproductive thoughts in your head and replace them with more supportive ones.

- **Eat healthy and get active:** "Most people are on dietary habits that are not particularly healthy," said Maddux. "We do know that food can affect mood." That's why he recommends eating a [healthy diet](#) along with reducing alcohol consumption. Focusing on [physical activity](#) to manage anxiety symptoms is also a big part of an anxiety self-care plan. "The importance of exercise cannot be overstated, because there's so much research showing that exercise is so important for managing both anxiety and depression."
- **Engage in online therapy:** "There's ... more and more research showing that online programs for anxiety and depression can be just as effective as face-to-face. Usually, these are CBT programs," Maddux noted. He said these programs are particularly great for "people living in a rural area or small town with few resources for psychotherapy."
- **Read up on anxiety:** "There are a lot of really good self-help books out there," Maddux noted. His favorites? *The Anxiety and Worry Workbook* by David Clark and Aaron Beck and *The Anxiety Skills Workbook* by Stefan Hofmann.
- **Meditate:** "Learning how to meditate can also be very helpful," Maddux said. "There's an app I use called Calm. Even just 10 minutes a day can help people manage both depression and anxiety."

NAMI states that another therapy, called exposure response therapy, can be used alongside CBT to help people with anxiety develop a healthier response to fear.

Anxiety medications may also be [prescribed by your doctor](#) to help you improve the emotional and physical symptoms of the condition. These include [anxiety](#) medications for short-term use and antidepressants.

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