



Canadian Mental
Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

HOW TO REDUCE ANXIETY



Plainer language series

Anxiety comes up when you think that something bad will happen. Some anxiety is normal. Everyone feels anxiety at times. No one can get rid of all anxiety in their life.

Anxiety is a problem when it gets in the way. It is a problem when you avoid things or change the way you do things because you feel anxious.

Anxiety is also a problem when it comes up often, even when you are not in danger. People who have a lot of unhelpful anxiety may not even know why they feel anxious.

The goal is to deal with this unhelpful anxiety.

To deal with unhelpful anxiety, you need to notice when it is happening and take a closer look at what you are thinking when you are anxious. Next, you will need to look at how you act when you are anxious. Finally, you will learn a few ways to take care of yourself at home.



PART ONE: THOUGHTS

When you think something bad might happen, you react as if something bad will happen, even when it is not true. You also start focusing on the bad side of things. These negative thoughts add up. Soon, a small problem feels like a very big problem. This can make anxiety even worse.

If you are very anxious about being late for work, you may start by worrying that your boss will be angry. Then you may worry about losing your job. It is easy to see how these thoughts quickly grow until they are too much.

A big part of dealing with anxiety is dealing with the unhelpful thoughts that bring up anxiety. The first step is noticing your unhelpful thoughts. It may sound simple, but it can take practice. Most of us do not notice these thoughts.

Unhelpful thoughts often start with “What if?” and grow from there.

- What if I am late for work?
 - What if I miss an important meeting?
 - What if my boss is mad?
 - What if I am fired?
 - What if I cannot take care of my family?

At the beginning, it may be easier to see unhelpful thoughts after the anxiety passes. With practice, you will start to notice these thoughts when they come up.

The next step is to develop a more helpful thought. A helpful thought is more likely to be realistic and encouraging. In this step, think about all sides of the situation. You can ask yourself questions:

- Is there any proof to back up this thought?
- Have I thought about all sides of the situation? Did I miss anything?
- Have I been in this position before? What happened then?
- What are the chances that the thought will come true?
- If the worst does happen, can I do anything about it?

When you have a helpful thought, use it to challenge your unhelpful anxious thought.

For example, if you are anxious about being late for work, a helpful thought might look like this:

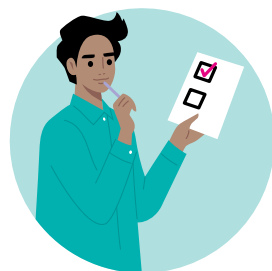
“Most of us are late once in a while. In fact, I have been late before. My boss was a bit upset, but I did not lose my job. Worrying about it more and feeling upset will not get me to work any faster.”

It is important to remember that thoughts are not facts. Having a thought does not mean it is true. It is just a thought.

Thinking about your thoughts may feel strange at first. With practice, it will become easier.

PART TWO: ACTIONS

Avoiding anxiety may make you feel better for a little while. But you may feel worse because you are not solving the problem that is causing anxiety in the first place. You may also miss good things in life when you avoid things.



There are three different skills in this part:

1. Stand up to anxiety
2. Solve problems
3. Set a schedule

The skills you use will depend on the situation that makes you feel anxious.

1. Stand up to anxiety

Do you avoid things because they make you anxious?
Here are some tips to try:

- Think of what you are avoiding.
- Think of the steps it will take to reach your goal.
Your steps can be as small as you need them to be.
- Decide when you will do each step. Set aside time to follow your steps.
- Remember to use your helpful thinking skills from Part One when you need them.



Pretend that you are scared of dogs. Here are steps you might take:

1. Read a book about dogs.
2. Watch a movie about dogs.
3. Watch dogs in the park.
4. Sit in the same room as a dog.
5. Pet a dog on a leash.
6. Pet a dog off a leash.
7. Go with a friend when they walk their dog.
8. Walk a dog by yourself.

Remember to challenge unhelpful thoughts when they come up. Take note of what you learn in each step. Pretend that you are petting a dog off a leash. An unhelpful thought says that the dog will bite you. But

you have already petted a dog on a leash, and the dog did not hurt you. You can use this information to build more realistic thoughts.

If you have very strong fears that cause big changes in your life, it is best to talk to a doctor.

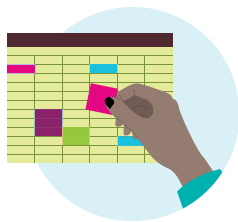
2. Solve problems

Part of standing up to anxiety is fixing problems. This skill can help you solve problems when you feel stuck.

1. Decide what the problem is. Try to be as exact as possible. It is easier to solve a problem when you know what needs to be fixed.
2. Think of different solutions or end goals. Think of as many as you can. Write them all down, even if they seem silly.
3. Pick the solution that you think will work best.
4. Decide what you need to do to try your solution. This is your plan. You can break your plan into small steps if you need to.
5. Put your plan into action. Remember to use skills you have learned, such as realistic thinking and standing up to anxiety.
6. Look back to see if your plan worked. If it did not work, pick a different solution from your list in Step 2 and make a new plan. Keep going until you find a solution that works.

3. Set a schedule

You may feel anxious about something you can't fix right away. Many people find worries come up at night when they try to sleep. Often, making a plan to deal with a problem later can lower anxiety.



In this case, you can schedule a time to deal with the worry.

- Write down the worry on a piece of paper.
- Decide when and what time you will deal with the worry.
- Set the paper aside until it is time to deal with it.



PART THREE: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

We can do many little things at home to deal with anxiety. They do not take a lot of time, but they can make a big difference! Here are some things to try:

- Try to get enough sleep every night. It is easy to feel anxious when you are tired. If you feel like you are too anxious to sleep well, it is best to talk to a doctor.
- Try to exercise regularly. Exercise is good for your body and your mind.
- Spend time on activities you enjoy. It is easy to get stuck on thoughts or feelings when you feel anxious. Enjoying something even when you feel anxious can make anxiety easier to manage over time. Doing yoga, going outside in nature, reading or making art are a few things to try.
- Talk with others about what worries you. Fears can feel smaller when they are not just in your head. Friends, family and counsellors can help you see think about things in a more helpful way. Just remember that others should not do all the work. You need to practice helpful thinking on your own, too.
- Plan for anxiety. Events like moving into a new house or starting a new job can be stressful. The good news is they do not take you by surprise. You can use your thinking and problem-solving skills to plan how you will deal with these events ahead of time.

WHEN TO FIND HELP

Many different things can cause feelings of anxiety. Both physical health problems and mental health problems can make you feel a lot of anxiety. If your anxiety is hard to manage on your own, it is best to talk to a doctor. Big worries or fears can be hard to manage on your own but there are people who can help you.



Where can I go from here?

You can learn more about anxiety from these resources:

Anxiety Canada

Visit anxietycanada.com for more information on anxiety and anxiety disorders. You can watch videos, listen to a podcast, find a group therapy course, or learn self-help tools to help you cope with anxiety at home.

Wellness Modules

Visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca for information sheets and other useful information. You can learn more about depression and other problems. You can read stories and connect with others who are dealing with depression. There are three booklets to help you: dealing with a diagnosis of depression (when your doctor says you have depression), working with your doctor, and preventing relapse of depression. These booklets are available in English only. You can also learn more about mental health organizations in BC.



BC Mental Health Support Line

This phone service can help you when you are worried, stressed or upset. They can help with a lot of other problems, too. They can help you find services in your community. You can also call if you just need to talk to someone. Call **310-6789** (do not add an area code) any time of day or night. You can talk to someone right away. Translators can help you in many different languages. Say the name of the language you need in English to get an interpreter.

BounceBack® program

BounceBack is for people dealing with low mood, stress, or anxiety. You learn skills in an online course. You can also talk with a trained worker called a “coach” on the phone. The program is free. Telephone coaches speak English, French, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Punjabi. Bounce Back is run by the Canadian Mental Health Association. Visit **www.bouncebackbc.ca** for information on the BounceBack program.

This booklet was written by the Canadian Mental Health Association’s BC Division. It is based on current research and resources. We also check key facts with doctors and other mental health experts. Please contact us if you want to know what resources we used.

Founded in 1918, CMHA is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians.

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British Columbia
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