

April 2019 Issue

## Understanding Anxiety

Anxiety can be described as feeling a small amount of worry all the way to a deep-rooted fear. Some amount of anxiety can be expected in life, and like all feelings, when managed well it is not a problem. Anxiety even can have benefits like making us sharp for a big presentation, getting our hearts pumping to compete in a race, and fine-tuning our memory to help us succeed on a test.



Sometimes anxiety can become overly intense or too frequent. Anxiety can make us feel stressed, overwhelmed, and even sad. Physically, it can make our stomach hurt, cause us to have headaches, and make our muscles tense. We might have racing thoughts or get stuck thinking through all of the “what ifs” of an upcoming scenario. Sometimes it can be hard to fall asleep or concentrate. Anxiety can hinder our short-term memory. Panic attacks also can result from anxiety. At times people can experience such extreme episodes that they end up in the ER afraid that they are having a heart attack or maybe even dying. Panic can be paralyzing, scary, and leave you feeling out of control.

### Does my spouse or child have anxiety?

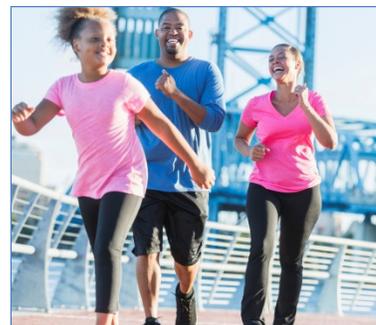
As mentioned above, you may notice your spouse or child experiencing similar symptoms: excessive worry about the future, trouble sleeping or concentrating, or maybe even a specific fear. It can be difficult to watch your loved one struggle with anxiety. Although tempting to jump in with a “quick fix,” it often is better to provide gentle support by encouraging healthy habits and choices, empathizing and acknowledging that you don’t understand what it feels like to have anxiety or a panic attack, and supporting their treatment efforts. For your child, early intervention is ideal so that they more easily can learn to cope and incorporate new ways of positive thinking.

### Is it an anxiety disorder?

When anxiety is felt too often, including feeling panicked, or is getting in the way of your daily life, it may be an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders can be genetic, and often a parent or sibling has been diagnosed previously. Anxiety disorders also can be situational, caused by a specific traumatic event or an ongoing stressor. Whatever the cause, there are a variety of treatment options to consider. The first step is talking with your family doctor or seeing a behavioral health provider, such as through an employee assistance program like TriHealth EAP. It also is important to remember that only a professional can diagnose an anxiety disorder, and you should shy away from labeling yourself or your loved ones. Whether you have occasional anxiety or have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, there are many ways to manage your symptoms including a healthy lifestyle, relaxation strategies, brief counseling, medication and more.

## Alleviating Anxiety through Lifestyle Habits

Most of us experience some level of anxiety occasionally. It's normal to have feelings of anxiety as we have new experiences and navigate daily life. Just as causes and symptoms of anxiety can vary, so too do the ways that we cope with these feelings. According to health information websites Mayo Clinic and Spark People, some lifestyle changes that can help make a difference focus on diet and exercise:



- **Consider complex carbohydrates.** Complex carbs like whole grains elevate the serotonin in your brain. Serotonin is a chemical in the body known for contributing to feelings of happiness or wellbeing and having a calming effect
- **Stay hydrated.** Even mild dehydration can have a negative impact on your mood. Also limit caffeine and alcohol consumption.
- **Talk with your doctor about food sensitivities.** Sometimes foods or food additives can cause negative reactions in our bodies, impacting our wellbeing.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise decreases tension in our bodies and increases endorphins, which can improve the way our bodies react to stress. Make sure to select exercises or activities that you enjoy and consult your doctor if you are new to regular physical activity.

---

## Four Ways to Treat Anxiety-Related Sleep Problems

We've all had a night of tossing and turning. It's frustrating, and usually leads us to spend the entire next day longing for a nap. Fortunately, sleeplessness is temporary – for most people. But, for others – especially those with depression or anxiety – that's rarely the case. "When somebody is depressed and anxious at the same time, when they go to look at their bed, they become anxious at the idea that they can't actually sleep, so it's a self-perpetuating problem," [Junaid Malik MD](#), of [TriHealth Pulmonary Medicine](#), explains.



1. **Stop Worrying:** Dr. Malik says sleep is physiological and a natural part of everyone's life. "It's just like how you have to drink water or you have to go to the bathroom. Sleep is just like that. If you leave it alone, it will happen," he says.  
If you're a chronic worrier, Dr. Malik suggests writing down a list of things you are concerned about before you attempt to sleep and mentally note that these are the things you will worry about tomorrow, not at that present moment.
2. **Make it a Ritual:** Help prepare your body for a night of sleep by following a particular pattern each evening. For example, turn off the television, brush your teeth, read a book, and aim to be in bed by the same time each night.
3. **Dim the Lights:** As you're getting ready for bed, start lowering the lights, but leave enough light so you can safely navigate your home in the last minutes before bedtime. Also, avoid watching television or using an electronic object – like a mobile device or computer – with an artificial light source within an hour of heading to your bedroom.
4. **If You Can't Fall Asleep, Don't Force It:** If you are not able to fall asleep within 20 minutes of getting into bed, then get out of bed, leave your bedroom, and try something else that's relaxing, like reading a book. The more you associate your bedroom with sleeplessness, the more anxious you will feel at bedtime.