

# Anxiety

## Signs of anxiety:

- Continuous worry about events or actions that is affecting your ability to cope with daily life
- Muscle tension
- Sleep changes (either not being able to sleep or sleeping more than usual without cause)
- Restlessness
- Bodily signs such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, palpitations, trembling, hard to breathe, chest tightness, sickness, diarrhoea, flushing, faintness or high blood pressure
- Very tired
- Problems focusing
- Racing thoughts
- Irritability
- Bodily complaints (such as: unanswered aches and pains)
- Feeling shaky or nervous
- Avoiding certain places or events because of incapacitating fear
- Pacing
- Fears of losing control, going crazy or dying

## Typical feelings of being anxious, worried and fearful:

The important thing to remember is that feeling anxious, worried and fearful is usually brief and time-limited.

### Symptoms can:

- impact sleeping and eating
- decrease ability to concentrate
- create temporary withdrawal from social activities
- disrupt your usual patterns or routines
- increase your irritability or impatience
- be connected to a specific issue
- have symptoms that increase and decrease as issue arises

### Symptoms do not:

- stop your ability to look forward to the future
- stop your ability to make necessary decisions

## **Problems with anxiety and phobias:**

Problems with anxiety can interfere with your quality of life and prevent you from absorbing information or making treatment decisions, worsen your pain, or generally make life miserable. If you have problems with anxiety you may have an anxiety disorder. Talk to your doctor.

### **You're more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety during cancer treatment if you:**

- had an anxiety disorder in the past
- have a history of physical or emotional trauma
- have severe pain
- have a type of cancer or receive a type of treatment that can cause symptoms of anxiety
- have little support

### **Anxiety can vary in intensity:**

Feelings of anxiety can increase or decrease at different times. You may become more anxious if the cancer spreads or treatment becomes more intense. The level of anxiety experienced by one person can also be different from the anxiety experienced by another person. It is important to assess how you and others are feeling at different times during your cancer experience.

### **Caused by cancer and/or treatments:**

There are certain cancers that may create physical problems that cause anxiety. Many cancer medications and treatments can aggravate feelings of anxiety. Many patients experience anxiety connected to fear of uncontrolled pain, being left alone or having to depend on others. Many of these factors can be managed with support.

Even after treatment is completed, you may find yourself facing higher levels of anxiety. For example, you may experience anxiety when you return to work and are asked about your cancer experience, or when dealing with insurance-related problems.

### **Phobias:**

Remember that fears of certain things like closed spaces or needles can interfere with your treatment plan. Make sure your health care team knows of any pre-existing issues connected to anxiety or phobias.

## **Your toolbox for managing stress:** (taken from our [Managing Stress](#) handout)

*Remember the acronym REDS (Reduce stress - Exercise 30 minutes per day - Diet/nutrition - Sleep)*

- Keep a diary or record of how and when stress increases and what makes you feel better. Let your cancer care team know if your symptoms are getting worse.
- Learn about the benefits of mindfulness and meditation in reducing stress.
- Find and practice relaxation techniques that can help manage stress.

The following can get you started:

- Audio stream Mindfulness & Meditation and Relaxation & Guided Imagery playlists on Soundcloud - <https://soundcloud.com/phsabc> using your mobile device or computer. Download the free Soundcloud app from an app store (search BC Cancer).
  - [Deep Breathing Exercises](#) (see handout)
  - [Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercises](#) (see handout)
- 
- Exercise can reduce the negative effects of stress on your body. 30 minutes of moderate exercise three times weekly is recommended. Talk with your family doctor before you start a new exercise plan so that you can realistically manage before during and after cancer treatment. Exercise Support can now be found at [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca) Health Info – Coping with Cancer
  - Practice good eating habits (as needed, call a registered dietitian at Health Link BC 8-1-1 toll-free) Good nourishment is required for both physical and mental energy as well as emotional stability. Limit sweets and other "junk" foods. Drink plenty of fluids.
  - Practice good sleep habits (see our "[Strategies to help with Sleep](#)" handout).
  - Listen to calming music, be creative and take part in pleasant distractions.
  - If medications are a part of your health care plan, take them as prescribed. Do not stop taking medications without first checking with your doctor.
  - Humour can be a wonderful stress reducer. Spend time with friends laughing. Watch a comedy or call a friend who makes you laugh.
  - Take a break from talking about cancer - take some time to dream and reminisce.
  - Talk things through with another person. Sometimes it might be a family member or a friend. Sometimes you may need the help of a professional counsellor. Call and make an appointment with Patient & Family Counselling Services at your cancer Centre.
  - Attend a support group at your cancer centre, online or in the community.
  - Take a course on "Managing Anxiety" through Keltyskey - <https://www.keltyskey.com/>