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FREE
ANTI-
ANXIETY
GUIDE

SEATTLE ANXIETY
SPECIALISTS, PLLC





ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This free anti-anxiety guide provides information about how everyday choices you make can affect your brain and either intensify, or ameliorate, some of the symptoms of anxiety.

This guide is not therapy and is not intended to replace therapy. If you suffer from anxiety, this information may help you to reduce your symptoms. However, you should also speak to a licensed therapist about beginning a course of therapy.

If you or someone you know is in crisis or experiencing an emergency, please dial 911 or call the 24 hour King County Crisis Line at 866-4-CRISIS.

Action is the enemy of anxiety.
Take action.

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DISCLAIMER

ALTHOUGH USUALLY
PSYCHOLOGICAL IN ORIGIN,
ANXIETY AND ITS SYMPTOMS CAN
SOMETIMES BE THE RESULT OF
OTHER MEDICAL CONDITIONS. AS
SUCH, THIS GUIDE SHOULD NOT
REPLACE OR SUPERSEDE ANY
ADVICE GIVEN FROM YOUR DOCTOR.

PLEASE CONSULT YOUR PRIMARY
CARE PHYSICIAN BEFORE STOPPING
OR STARTING ANY MEDICATIONS,
ILLICIT DRUGS, FITNESS REGIMENS,
AND SO FORTH.

THANK YOU.

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EXERCISE

One of the healthiest and most effective ways of coping with the symptoms of anxiety is exercise.

The discomfort felt in anxiety is tied directly to cravings for certain neurotransmitters. Exercise releases these neurotransmitters, and this is just one of the ways that it works to relieve anxiety. Exercising regularly also changes a person's physiology, and makes them less prone to anxiety even when they are not working out.

Exercise can take considerable willpower, but it gets easier over time. The next time you feel anxious, try engaging in some form of exercise before resorting to a less healthy coping strategy. Even just going for a walk can help. Hiring a personal trainer or teaming up with a fitness buddy are also great strategies for staying motivated.

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NUTRITION

In addition to healthy guidelines such as eating a balanced diet and drinking enough water to stay hydrated, there are many other dietary choices that can lead to relief from anxiety. For example, complex carbohydrates are metabolized more slowly and therefore help maintain a more even blood sugar level, which creates a calmer feeling. A diet rich in whole grains, vegetables, and fruits can help for these reasons. At the same time, try to avoid eating a lot of simple carbohydrates, which are commonly found in processed foods.

When you eat is also important. Don't skip meals, as doing so may result in drops in blood sugar that cause you to feel jittery and which may worsen the symptoms of anxiety. You can also try bringing healthy snacks with you whenever you leave the house. This is a great way to take a bite out of anxiety.

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SLEEP

If you are an anxious person, you already know that anxiety can interfere with getting a good night's rest. What is perhaps less obvious is that a lack of sleep can itself significantly contribute to anxiety, creating a vicious cycle from which it is difficult to break free.

Part of the reason for this is that when someone gets inadequate sleep, they are likely to drink more caffeine. This increased caffeine consumption contributes to anxiety, especially at the end of the day, which makes it much more difficult to fall asleep. To wind down and get to sleep, many people resort to self-medicating with substances such as alcohol or cannabis. However, substances such as these significantly diminish sleep quality by interfering with REM sleep. Insufficient REM sleep can lead to anxiety, feeling drained, and an inability to focus.

If you feel too stressed to sleep, try going to the gym before bed. Exercise can relieve your anxiety, make it easier for you to fall asleep, and improve your sleep quality.

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SUBSTANCES

Several substances have the power to cause or exacerbate anxiety, whether through their initial effects, from withdrawal, or as a result of ongoing use.

These substances include alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, stimulants such as caffeine, opioids, and even prescription anti-anxiety medications such as benzodiazepines.

While many people report self-medicating with these substances, improvements in anxiety from them are usually short-lived, with worsening of anxiety in the long-run, sometimes with acute anxiety as soon as the effects of the substance wear off.

Because of their prevalence, and the ease with which one can modify their intake, caffeine, alcohol, and cannabis will be touched on in more detail below.

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CAFFEINE

Although caffeine is not the root cause of anxiety, it can make an already anxious person considerably more anxious. Caffeine can also diminish sleep quality, which in turn contributes to anxiety.

One of the ways that caffeine increases anxiety is by triggering the release of epinephrine, a stress related hormone that can intensify the brain's normal fight-or-flight response.

Should you decide either to cut down on, or to quit caffeine altogether, be prepared for the withdrawal symptoms. They can include headache, fatigue, drowsiness, depressed mood, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and flu like symptoms such as nausea or muscle pain. These withdrawal symptoms should clear up as soon as your body becomes adjusted to the lower dose of caffeine. This can take anywhere from a couple of days to several months depending on the person.

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ALCOHOL

While alcohol intake initially has an anti-anxiety effect by increasing the activity of the neurotransmitter GABA, regular alcohol use can result in an overall GABA deficiency that offsets the effects of acute consumption and can lead to increased anxiety over time.

Because of these neurological changes, withdrawal can lead to excessive activity of certain brain systems that are involved in the production of anxiety. Not surprisingly, clinical studies show that people with alcoholism who are recently abstinent usually report increased feelings of anxiety.

The upshot is that if you decide to consume fewer drinks, your GABA levels should become correspondingly less deficient over time. This means that, in the long run, having fewer drinks can lead to having less anxiety.

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CANNABIS

There is currently no scientific consensus on the relationship between cannabis and anxiety. Also, little is known about how exactly it affects the brain. This is partly due to the fact that cannabis affects individuals in different ways and because there are a number of different psychoactive chemicals in cannabis, such as THC and CBD, that are present in different amounts in its many strains.

What is known is that some individuals become more anxious because of cannabis use. This anxiety can occur as an effect of cannabis intoxication, as part of withdrawal (which can last up to a month), or as a side effect of prolonged and regular use.

If you use cannabis regularly and suffer from anxiety, you may wish to consider a brief hiatus. Because your neurochemistry will take about a month to normalize, after your last use, it is a good idea to give yourself at least that much time to see what your anxiety is like without cannabis.

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MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the practice of turning your attention to what you are experiencing in the present moment. It is being here and now, and attempting to do so without judgment. Whenever you bring awareness to what you are experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you are being mindful.

While there is no scientific consensus on how exactly mindfulness works in the brain, there is ample evidence that it can help people to overcome anxiety.

This is because feelings of anxiety are often driven by a flow of anxious thoughts. Mindfulness allows you to step out of that flow of thoughts, either by focusing on something else, or by noticing the effect the thoughts are having on you, which can give you the space to try and change them. In the next couple of pages, two strategies for practicing mindfulness will be explored.

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MEDITATION

One way that you can increase your level of mindfulness is through meditation. The point of meditation is to practice just being present with your experience, to be in the here-and-now, detached from the stream of thoughts that drive anxious feelings. Try the following meditation when you have a little time to spare:

Find a good spot and time of day where you can remove yourself from distractions. Shutting your phone off is a good idea, for example. Get comfortable and try to bring as much of your attention as possible to the things that you are experiencing in the present moment. Notice more intently the qualities of things, their colors, their sounds, their textures, and so forth. Thoughts will routinely force their way into your mind, but gently bring yourself back again each time into your experience in the present.

Meditating regularly is not only a helpful and healthy coping mechanism for anxiety, it also has the long-term benefit of making it easier to be mindful when not meditating, which can lead to less anxiety in all parts of your life.

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THOUGHT STOPPING

Thought stopping is a technique from Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, sometimes just called "living in the moment." It is like meditating, but less intensive. You can try it while engaged in other activities. The point of thought stopping is to become more absorbed in whatever you are doing while ignoring the anxious thoughts that are driving your anxiety.

Because these anxious thoughts are so distracting, the first step in thought stopping is just noticing that your mind is being hijacked by these thoughts. Rather than letting yourself ruminate, try to force your mind to focus on whatever the task is at hand - and if you are not doing anything that can distract you from these anxiety provoking thoughts, then find something. Going to the gym is always a healthy option. Also, writing down your anxious thoughts is much more productive than letting them cycle through your mind endlessly. Once they are out on paper, you can more calmly work through them, and should not feel as much stress about having to remember all their details.

Learning to live in the moment, while engaged in day-to-day tasks, can increase your productivity, make you happier, and decrease your anxiety symptoms.

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EXPOSURE

Exposure to situations that provoke unwanted anxiety is an uncomfortable but highly effective strategy in overcoming one's anxiety.

Navigating stressful situations without anxiety depends on being able to do certain things almost automatically, and doing things automatically requires well developed neural pathways. Because of the brain's neuroplasticity, such pathways become eroded if they are not used. However, neuroplasticity is not just entropic. These same neural pathways can also be built up over time with sufficient exposure to stressful situations.

Individuals should try to expose themselves to as many situations that provoke their anxiety as they can reasonably tolerate (and without putting themselves in any actual harms way). Their anxiety will become diminished in these situations, over time, in part because they will be able to navigate them more intuitively.

Exposure also provides powerful evidence that our fears are simply untrue or greatly exaggerated. This helps diminish our tendency to interpret such situations negatively, which in turn greatly reduces anxiety.

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PSYCHOTHERAPY

Therapy from a competent and licensed professional is by far the most effective approach to treating anxiety. This has been confirmed by decades of rigorous scientific research. When done right, therapy works so well that it outperforms medications intended for those suffering from anxiety, such as SSRIs and benzodiazepines.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is usually the first line of treatment for anxiety disorders, especially for individuals who suffer from more acute symptoms. It is an active form of therapy in which thinking patterns are identified, analyzed, and deliberately changed through targeted interventions.

The scientific evidence supporting CBT is overwhelming. It works well and it works quickly. In contrast to many other forms of therapy, CBT can usually be completed in just a few months.

In addition to CBT, more exploratory forms of therapy, such as psychodynamic therapy and existential therapy, can be helpful for clients with anxieties related to meaning and personal identity.

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THANK YOU & GOOD LUCK !

If you have read through this guide, give yourself credit. Many people never overcome their anxieties because they chronically avoid dealing with them. Even just recognizing that you could benefit from some help, whether it be in the form of professional help or a self-help guide, takes a great deal of courage and personal insight. If you are willing to take the necessary next steps, a life not governed by anxiety is not only a possibility - it is an attainable reality.

If you try any of the suggestions in this guide, please share your experiences. Good feedback is crucial to improving this guide and helping others that are suffering from anxiety. You can reach us by email at: info@seattleanxiety.com

Thank you and good luck!

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