

# ENTERHEALTH

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MENTAL WELLNESS

## Understanding and Addressing Anxiety

with Harold Urschel III, MD, MMA, Enterhealth Chief Medical Strategist

# What Are Worry, Stress and Anxiety?

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## Worry

- Repeatedly dwelling on unhelpful thoughts
- Experienced in the mind

## Stress

- Physiologically responding to external stressors
- Experienced in the body

## Anxiety

- Simultaneously dealing with worry and stress
- Experienced in the mind and body



# What Are Sources of Worry, Stress and Anxiety in General?

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- Past or future experiences
- Professional goals
- Financial issues
- Personal safety
- Social situations
- Interpersonal relationships
- Outside judgment
- Professional mistakes
- Personal appearance
- Difficult news

# What Have Been Sources of Worry, Stress and Anxiety in the Pandemic?

- Basic needs
- Professional performance
- Financial security
- Personal health
- Social connections
- Safety precautions
- Interpersonal behavior
- Workload management
- Uncertain situations
- Worldly issues



# What Causes Anxiety in General?

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## Current life situation

- Arguing with a spouse, working a high-stress job or neglecting health

## Past life experiences

- Lacking security, stability or support at home or school

## Genetic factors

- Being predisposed to have anxiety or tolerate it better

## Medical conditions

- Having heart disease, diabetes or hormone disorders

## Substance use

- Using to take the edge off or cope with anxious thoughts and feelings



# What Has Caused Anxiety in the Pandemic?

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## Financial problems

- Dealing with unemployment or struggling to pay extra medical bills

## Caregiver responsibilities

- Homeschooling children or tending to a sick loved one

## Social isolation

- Missing out on life events or personal connections

## News cycle

- Managing constant stream of negative information

## Mental state

- Navigating uncertainty without previous experience



# What Are the Physical Symptoms of Anxiety?

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- Feeling shakiness, trembling or faintness
- Experiencing difficulty breathing
- Having trouble relaxing
- Being so restless that it is hard to sit still
- Experiencing dry mouth or difficulty swallowing

# What Are the Mental Symptoms of Anxiety?

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- Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
- Worrying too much about different things
- Not being able to stop or control worrying
- Feeling afraid that something bad might happen
- Becoming easily annoyed or irritable





# How Can You Manage Anxiety's Physical Symptoms?

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## Identify your triggers

- Determine professional and personal situations that cause problems for you and try to limit your exposure to them

## Manage your triggers

- Lean on family, friends and professionals for support and guidance to deal with triggers you cannot change or avoid

## Eat a healthy diet

- Consume a variety of vegetables and fruits, nuts and legumes, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy products

# How Can You Manage Anxiety's Physical Symptoms?

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## Exercise regularly

- Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity every day, even if it is simply a brisk walk during your lunch break

## Get enough sleep

- Keep consistent sleep and wake times to ensure your body and mind get seven to nine hours of rest each night

## Limit problematic habits

- Reduce caffeine, abstain from alcohol and quit smoking to improve all areas of your physical and mental health



# How Can You Manage Anxiety's Mental Symptoms?

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## Give yourself a break

- Step away from the situation and shift your focus from the thoughts in your mind to the movement of your body

## Try meditation

- Engage in a routine practice to help you train your mind to dismiss unhelpful worries and concerns when they arise

## Practice breathing exercises

- Try breathing out for twice as many counts as you breathe in to slow your heart rate and calm your mind

# How Can You Manage Anxiety's Mental Symptoms?

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## Stay connected to people

- Maintain regular contact with family, friends and colleagues who care about you and provide you positive support

## Write down your thoughts

- Take down your worries on paper to get them out of your head and map out a plan to make them feel less daunting

## Challenge your thinking

- Ask yourself if there is tangible evidence to support your concerns, and if there is, determine what you can actually control





# What Are Anxious Thoughts and Feelings Continuing in the Pandemic?



- Concerns about new variants
- Doubts about travel safety
- Worries about job flexibility
- Uncertainty about school year
- Concerns about economic delays
- Doubts about vaccine effectiveness
- Worries about pets at home
- Uncertainty about pandemic duration
- Concerns about financial stability
- Worries about new normal in life



# How Can You Respond to Anxious Thoughts and Feelings?

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## **Normalize your reactions**

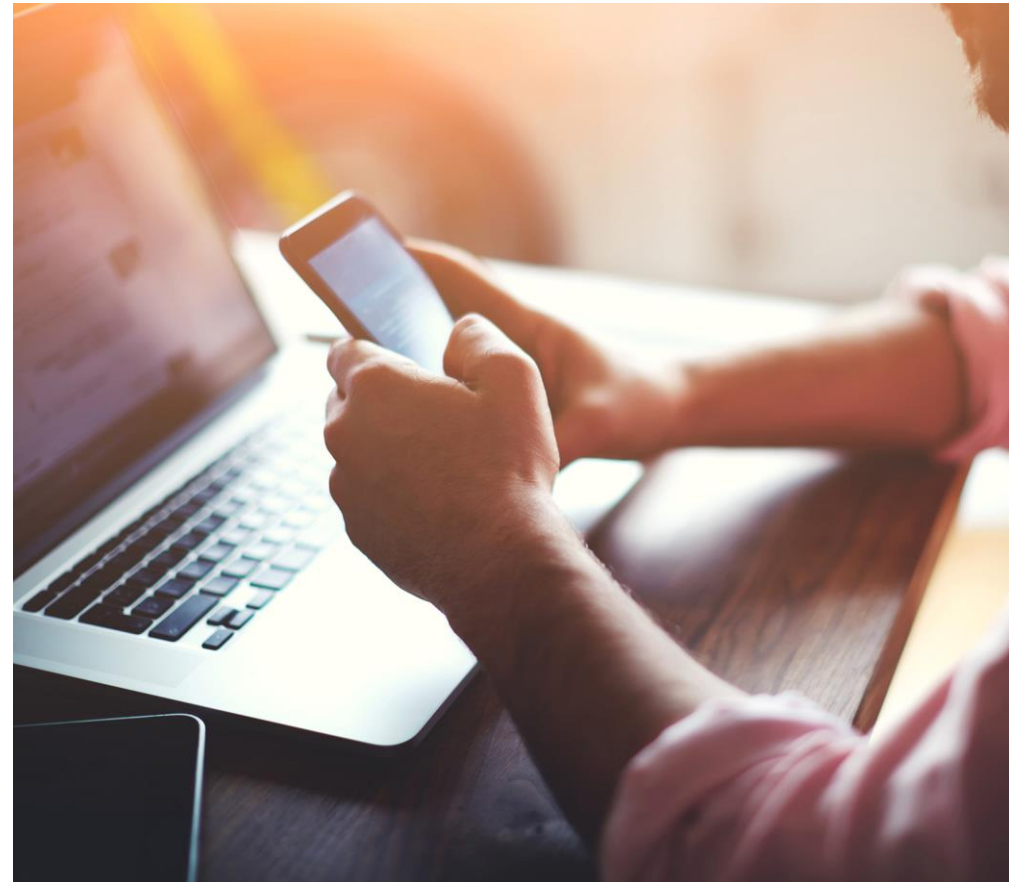
- Remind yourself that your concerns are normal and valid in this situation and respond by practicing self-compassion

## **Gather reputable information**

- Select sources that provide reliable, evidence-based guidance so you can calm doubts in your mind with facts

## **Limit news and social media**

- Set boundaries for how long you watch the news and scroll through social media to avoid getting caught up in negativity



# How Can You Respond to Anxious Thoughts and Feelings?

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## Create a routine and schedule

- Combat uncertainty by instituting as much structure in your days and making as many plans for your future as possible

## Practice pandemic precautions

- Remember there is no pressure to relax habits like wearing a mask or keeping your distance if they help you feel safe

## Talk about your situation

- Have genuine conversations with family, friends and colleagues about shared experiences to create a support system

# What Happens If Anxiety Goes Untreated?

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- Work performance problems
- Interpersonal relationship trouble
- Physical health issues and illnesses
- Cognitive trouble and decline
- Loneliness and social isolation
- Sleep problems and insomnia
- Fear and phobia development
- Mental health issues and disorders
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Suicidal thoughts and behaviors



# What Can You Do to Seek Help for Anxiety?

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## Look into your benefits

- Determine if your employee assistance program or health insurance provider offer free assessments and counseling

## Explore telehealth services

- Lean on licensed clinicians that provide convenient remote sessions to teach you strategies and offer medication options

## Call mental health helplines

- Reach out to resource center hotlines if you are not sure where to start or if you are in immediate need of assistance

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# Questions and Answers

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