



# Anxiety

## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a common condition. It is a normal, human reaction to stressful situations. It's good to know there are many ways to manage anxiety so it doesn't affect your daily life.

## What does anxiety feel like?

Anxiety can make you feel nervous, worried, panicky and fearful. You might feel anxious at different times, like when you are under pressure at work. But most of the time, your emotions will calm down after a stressful situation has passed.

## When does anxiety become an anxiety disorder?

If you feel anxious for no reason, your anxiety doesn't go away or your anxiety affects your quality of life, you might have an anxiety disorder. One in three women are affected by an anxiety disorder at some stage in their life.

## Symptoms of anxiety

People have different experiences of anxiety. Symptoms can vary depending on the type and level of anxiety.

### Physical symptoms

When you have anxiety, your body can react in different ways. For example, you might sweat, feel sick, find it hard to breathe or get a dry mouth.

### Emotional symptoms

When you feel anxious, you might experience different emotional symptoms. For example, you might think about your fears, imagine worst-case scenarios or have racing thoughts that feel uncontrollable.

### Behavioural symptoms

Sometimes anxiety can lead to changes in the way you behave. For example, you might avoid places or situations where you might feel uncomfortable, or avoid talking to others – especially strangers.

## What causes anxiety?

Anxiety is usually caused by a combination of factors. For example, family history, personality traits, beliefs and attitudes, stressful events and health problems.

There are several women's health conditions that are associated with anxiety. For example, endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

Different life stages can also increase anxiety, such as puberty, pregnancy, after childbirth and menopause.

## Managing anxiety

There are lots of ways to manage anxiety. One of the most important things you can do is be kind to yourself. Try not to judge yourself. Instead, acknowledge your feelings and remember you're doing the best you can. You may need to try different approaches before you find one that helps you.

## Looking after yourself

Your mood and anxiety may improve when you look after your health. For example, try to:

- eat healthy foods and choose water over sugary drinks
- do physical activities you enjoy, like walking, swimming or group training
- reduce or stop drinking alcohol or taking drugs
- develop good sleep habits.

## Practical tips

You can try a range of self-help strategies. For example:

- identify and understand your triggers (i.e. what makes you feel anxious)
- change negative thoughts to positive thoughts (e.g. 'I can't' to 'I can')
- remember that anxiety is a feeling, not a fact
- change your focus from thinking to doing
- talk to someone you trust
- practise relaxation and mindfulness techniques.

## Online programs and apps

There are many online programs and apps to try, but it's best to find information from well-respected sources. For example, Beyond Blue.

Read the Jean Hailes Tips for managing anxiety fact sheet. Visit [www.jh.today/tips-managing-anxiety](http://www.jh.today/tips-managing-anxiety).

## When to see your doctor

See your doctor if anxiety affects your daily life or you feel fearful most of the time. The earlier you seek help, the sooner you will feel better.

Your doctor can write a mental health treatment plan, which gives you a set number of sessions with a health professional at a reduced cost. They will refer you to a healthcare professional with experience managing anxiety. For example:

- a psychologist (registered mental health professional)
- a psychiatrist (medical doctor who can prescribe medicine)
- a registered counsellor.

Depending on your situation, your healthcare professional may recommend you try:

- practical self-help strategies
- different types of medicine.

**For more information, resources and references, visit [jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/anxiety](http://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/anxiety)**



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Disclaimer: This information does not replace medical advice. If you are worried about your health, talk to your doctor or healthcare team.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we acknowledge that this term is not inclusive of all people who may use our content.

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