What can you do to help yourself?

For mild symptoms of anxiety, or as an adjunct to other treatments, consider:

**Relaxation Exercises**
- *Deep or abdominal breathing* means using the muscles in the abdomen to breathe. Breathing from the abdomen helps to trigger other physiological relaxation responses in the body.
- *Progressive Muscle Relaxation* helps you recognize tension in your muscles and learn how to relieve this tension.
- *Guided Imagery* through audio recordings helps you remove yourself from the anxiety and picture a peaceful, relaxing scene.
- *Meditation, yoga, or calming music.*

**Aerobic Exercise**
- Such as running, brisk walking, biking, swimming, or aerobic dancing.
  - Reduces tension in the muscles.
  - Increases the capacity for the circulatory system to deliver oxygen to your body.
  - Reduces stress & increases stamina.
  - Stimulates the production of endorphins, or the “feel good” hormones.
  - Decreases cholesterol & blood pressure.

**Nutrition**
- Limit caffeine intake. Caffeine is a stimulant and can aggravate anxiety and trigger panic attacks. (Less than 100mg per day is best.)
- Limit nicotine use. Nicotine is also a stimulant and causes physiological arousal and makes your heart work harder.
- Limit alcohol intake. Alcohol may be calming in the short-term, but long-term use may cause GAD and panic attacks.
- Increase your intake of fresh fruits & vegetables, which are easier on your body to digest.

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Evenings by appointment only

IUPUI Counseling and Psychological Services

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Promoting psychological health, well-being, and success for all students.

Empowering student learning, inclusion and success through engagement.
**What Is Anxiety?**

Anxiety can be best understood by looking at what it is and is not. The feelings of anxiety and fear are similar. However, fear is focused on a concrete external object or situation. For example, being confronted by a wild animal, such as a bear or lion, creates fear because it presents a real level of physical threat. With anxiety, the focus is typically vague, such as “losing control” or “something bad happening.” Anxiety can affect your whole body; it’s a physiological, behavioral, and psychological experience all at once!

**Physiologically** anxiety includes…
- Rapid heartbeat
- Muscle tension
- Queasiness
- Dry mouth
- Sweating

**Behaviorally** anxiety includes…
- Decreased ability to act quickly or appropriately
- Difficulty expressing yourself
- Inability to deal with some everyday situations

**Psychologically** anxiety causes a…
- State of apprehension & uneasiness
- Feeling of detachment from yourself
- Fear of dying or going crazy

It is important to know that **some health problems** can cause the sensation of anxiety:
- Gastroesophageal reflux (GERD)
- Heart disease
- Hypothyroidism
- Menopause

*Before assuming your symptoms are anxiety, get a medical evaluation to rule out other possible causes.*

**What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) affects:
- 6.8 million American adults
- Twice as many women as men

GAD typically develops gradually and can begin at any point in life. The years of highest risk are between childhood and middle age.

**What are the symptoms of GAD?**

GAD is characterized by frequent and constant feelings of anxiety for prolonged periods of time. GAD often causes interference in many aspects of an individual’s life. Not everyone who has GAD has the exact same symptoms. Some people experience a few symptoms, others many. Severity of symptoms varies between individuals and also over time. Symptoms include:

- Unrelenting worry or obsession about small or large concerns
- Feeling keyed-up or on edge
- Fatigue
- Problems concentrating or mind “going blank”
- Irritability
- Muscle tension or body aches
- Trembling, feeling twitchy, or being easily startled
- Difficulty sleeping (getting to sleep, staying asleep or lack of restful sleep)
- Sweating or nausea or other gastrointestinal distress
- Shortness of breath or rapid heartbeat

**Other possible signs of GAD include:**
- Feeling overly anxious to fit in
- Lacking confidence
- Excessively redoing tasks because they are not perfect the first time
- Striving for approval
- Requiring a lot of reassurance
- Being a perfectionist

**When Should You Seek Treatment?**

Having some anxiety is a normal part of life, so how do you know when it’s time to seek help?

Seek counseling or talk to your doctor if:
- Worry interferes with work, school, relationships, or other parts of your life.
- Anxiety symptoms prevent you from performing your best.
- You feel depressed, sad, or have other mental health concerns.
- You use alcohol or drugs as a way to escape anxiety.
- You have thoughts of suicide or engage in self-harm behaviors.

**How is GAD Diagnosed?**

A good diagnostic evaluation will include a complete history of symptoms, evaluation of current stressors, and consideration of medical factors. Self-report questionnaires may also be used to assist in assessment. A medical or mental health professional should be consulted for an accurate diagnosis.

**How is GAD Treated?**

The choice of treatment will depend on the outcome of the evaluation. There are a variety of medications and psychotherapies that can be used to treat anxiety disorders. Some people with milder forms of anxiety may do well with psychotherapy alone. People with moderate to severe anxiety most often benefit from medication. There are many medication options, so for some individuals this may mean trial and error to figure out which is the best fit. Most individuals do best with combined treatment: medication to gain relatively quick symptom relief and psychotherapy to learn more effective ways to deal with life’s challenges.