

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Supporting someone with anxiety

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18% of the population. (Source: National Institute of Mental Health). If you know someone affected by this condition, you're certainly not alone.

Anxiety beyond the common sweaty palms before a test or a job interview is seen as a medical condition that, if left untreated, can have quite devastating effects. People with an anxiety disorder have no control over their anxiety. Given that depression frequently accompanies anxiety, and that people with panic disorder are seven times more likely to attempt suicide, prompt diagnosis and treatment is vital. The encouraging news is that anxiety is the most treatable of all mental conditions.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

Rest assured that anxiety is nothing to be ashamed of. And no one needs to fight this battle alone. Most health care professionals urge anxiety sufferers to visit their doctor and follow up on recommended treatment. In many cases, treatment may involve medication, therapy, stress management strategies or a combination of them all. Here are some great tips:

Signs of severe anxiety can include:

- Heightened nervousness, irritability, anger, depression and/or insomnia.
- Sudden avoidance of situations previously handled with ease, such as public speaking, social interaction, driving, being in crowded spaces, being confined in closed spaces, etc.
- Irrational fear of certain things such as spiders, snakes, heights, etc.
- Compulsive preoccupation with thoughts or rituals attached to cleanliness, order, security, counting, etc.
- Increasing withdrawal.
- Poor school or job performance.
- Thoughts of suicide.
- Flashbacks to previous trauma.
- Physical symptoms that may include shaking, trembling, racing heart, nausea, dry mouth, breathlessness, hot flushes, sweating, sensation of choking, headaches, stomach aches and tightness in the chest area.

How You Can Help

- **Encourage discussion.** Reassure the sufferer that help is available and that no one needs to fight anxiety alone.
- **Urge a visit to the doctor.** If the sufferer is reluctant, call the doctor for advice.

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- **Provide support** in following up treatment.
- **Help the sufferer ensure that they are getting a balanced and nutritious diet.**
- **Encourage exercise**, which is a great stress buster.
- **Share in stress reducing activities** such as walking in the park, jogging, listening to calming music or just enjoying quiet time together.
- **Remember the power of laughter.** Watch a comedy together.
- **Treat suicidal threats seriously.** Call your doctor or other authorities immediately.

As you may be well-aware, living with an anxiety disorder can be debilitating. Though not everyone is cured of their anxiety issues, treatment does offer relief for the vast majority of sufferers committed to healing. By following the steps above, you and the anxiety sufferer in your life should be well on the way to recovery.