

## **ANXIETY 101**

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### **WHAT IS ANXIETY?**

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by changes in thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations in which an individual anticipates impending danger.<sup>1</sup> Given its anticipatory nature, anxiety can simply be thought of as future-based worry.

Anxiety tends to get a bad wrap because it feels super uncomfortable, but ultimately its trying to protect you. Anxiety does this by predicting all of the potential things that can go wrong in hopes that they can be planned for or avoided altogether.

### **HOW DOES IT WORK?**

Anxiety activates our body's sympathetic nervous system in response to a real or perceived threat.<sup>2</sup> It does this by activating a tiny part of our brain called the amygdala, which acts like an internal alarm system.<sup>2</sup>

Once the amygdala is engaged, energy is directed to the fight-flight-freeze-fawn response, in anticipation that we may need to protect ourselves.<sup>2</sup> This usually produces both physical and psychological symptoms.

### **WHO IS AT RISK?**

Anxiety is a human emotion, just like anger, happiness, and sadness; therefore, all humans experience some level of anxiety.

However, how someone experiences anxiety might be very different. It can be helpful to think of anxiety as a spectrum, with general worry on one end and panic on the other.<sup>3</sup>

Research also suggests that anxiety disorders are influenced by both one's genetics and environment.<sup>4</sup>



**WHEN SHOULD YOU GET HELP?**

Experiencing anxiety in and of itself is no cause for concern; however, if you find that anxiety has become all-consuming, you have started to exhibit avoidant behaviour, or you find it difficult to cope when it shows up, it might be helpful to seek counselling support.

**HELPFUL RESOURCES**

- [Anxiety Canada](#) - A free self-paced course that allows you to create a personalized anxiety plan.
- [Mindshift App](#) - A free mobile app for your phone that offers various coping tools.
- [Wellness Together Canada](#) - Offers mental health resources and access to free counselling.
- [Kids Help Phone](#) - Call 1-800-668-6868 (tollfree) or text CONNECT to 686868.

**COMMON SYMPTOMS**

The following list contains a number of common anxiety symptoms:<sup>5</sup>

Thoughts

- “What Ifs”
- Worry about losing control

Emotions

- Excessive worry
- Irritability

Physical Sensations

- Heart-racing
- Sweating
- Stomach ache/nausea
- Derealization/depersonalization
- Shaking
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance

Please note the presence and severity of symptoms will vary from person to person.



For more information,  
check out

[www.pineappletherapy.ca](http://www.pineappletherapy.ca)

**References**

- <sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Anxiety. In *APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Retrieved January 1, 2023 from <https://dictionary.apa.org/inferiority-complex>
- <sup>2</sup> Davis, M. (1992). The role of the amygdala in fear and anxiety. *Annual review of neuroscience*, 15(1), 353-375.
- <sup>3</sup> Fletcher, J. (2021). *Anxiety: Practical about panic: A practical guide to understanding and overcoming anxiety disorder*. John Murray Learning.
- <sup>4</sup> Gottschalk, M. G., & Domschke, K. (2017). Genetics of generalized anxiety disorder and related traits. *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience*, 19(2), 159-168.
- <sup>5</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.