

Managing Symptoms of Anxiety

Gustavus Adolphus College Counseling Center

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental health problems on college campuses. Forty million U.S. adults suffer from an anxiety disorder, and 75 percent of them experience their first episode of anxiety by age 22.

There are many other factors that contribute to anxiety, including the transition to college and adulthood. Many students face new situations and relationships in college, and such transitions can trigger anxiety and other mental health concerns. The following factors both influence anxiety *and* are impacted by anxiety, and improvements in one area can lead to improvement in others:



Is this an “Everyday Anxiety” or an “Anxiety Disorder?”

Everyday Anxiety	Anxiety Disorder
Worry about paying bills, landing a job, a romantic breakup, or other important life events	Constant and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with daily life
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in an uncomfortable or awkward social situation	Avoiding social situations for fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated
A case of nerves or sweating before a big test, business presentation, stage performance, or other significant event	Seemingly out-of-the-blue panic attacks and the preoccupation with the fear of having another one
Realistic fear of a dangerous object, place, or situation	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger
Making sure that you are healthy and living in a safe hazard-free environment	Performing uncontrollable repetitive actions such as excessive cleaning or checking, or touching and arranging
Anxiety, sadness, or difficulty sleeping immediately after a traumatic event	Recurring nightmares, flashbacks, or emotional numbing related to a traumatic event that occurred several months or years before

Although we can't always clearly distinguish between "everyday anxiety" and an "anxiety disorder," what matters is how the worry and symptoms *impact you and your functioning*. If worry and symptoms of anxiety are getting in the way of living your life in an ideal manner, then seeking professional help and/or utilizing the coping strategies below may be useful for you.

Try these when you're feeling anxious or stressed:

- **Take a time-out.** Practice yoga, listen to music, meditate, get a massage, or learn relaxation techniques. Stepping back from the problem helps clear your head.
- **Eat well-balanced meals.** Do not skip any meals. Do keep healthful, energy-boosting snacks on hand.
- **Limit alcohol and caffeine,** which can aggravate anxiety and trigger panic attacks.
- **Get enough sleep.** When stressed, your body needs additional sleep and rest.
- **Exercise daily** to help you feel good and maintain your health.
- **Take deep breaths.** Inhale and exhale slowly, focusing on each breath in and then out. Breathe "calm" in and "stress" out.
- **Count to 10 slowly.** Repeat, and count to 20 if necessary.
- **Do your best.** Instead of aiming for perfection, which isn't possible, be proud of however close you get.
- **Accept that you cannot control everything.** Put your stress in perspective: Is it really as bad as you think?
- **Welcome humor.** A good laugh goes a long way.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.** Make an effort to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
- **Get involved.** Volunteer or find another way to be active in your community, which creates a support network and gives you a break from everyday stress.
- **Learn what triggers your anxiety.** Is it work, family, school, or something else you can identify? Write in a journal when you're feeling stressed or anxious, and look for a pattern.
- **Talk to someone.** Tell friends and family you're feeling overwhelmed, and let them know how they can help you. Talk to a physician or therapist for professional help.

Staff members of the **Gustavus Counseling Center** and **Health Service** are here to support you! The Counseling Center may be reached at (507) 933-7027, and the Health Service at (507) 933-7630. In emergency situations, contact Campus Safety at (507) 933-8888 or call 911.

References: Anxiety and Depression Association of America, National Institute of Mental Health