

Lifestyle changes can help ease anxiety

Making lifestyle changes is not easy for anyone. But when you are dealing with anxiety, breaking bad habits or adding new activities to your daily routine can be even more challenging. Your efforts, however, may be well worth it.

Anxiety is fear or worry that gets in the way of normal life.

There are ways that you can break bad habits and ease anxiety. Follow these tips below and start feeling better:

- **Start slowly.** At first, consider making just one lifestyle change.
- **Set realistic goals** that will help you improve, not be burdens.
- **Pick a lifestyle change** that appeals to you. You have a better chance of sticking with a plan if you enjoy that activity.
- **Keep at it.** The desired results may not happen immediately. If you put forth a consistent effort, the activities you choose will become easier and more pleasant. You will eventually experience overall improvement in your mood and functioning.

Try these lifestyle changes

Here are some lifestyle tips that may add to your success in coping with anxiety:

- **Limit caffeine.** Coffee and sodas can have a stimulating effect on the body and may actually increase worry and fear.

- **Avoid cigarettes.** People tend to smoke more when they are distressed, anxious, and worried. However, if you increase the frequency of cigarette smoking, it only masks anxious feelings temporarily, does not address the root cause of your problems, and leads to medical illnesses.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise helps people of all ages feel more relaxed and accepting of situations they cannot change. Choosing an activity you enjoy increases the chances of sticking with the exercise routine.
- **Focus on good nutrition.** A balanced, nourishing diet is essential for maintaining good emotional and physical health.
- **Drink alcoholic beverages in moderation.** Regular, heavy use of alcohol (beer, wine or spirits) masks anxious feelings for a short period of time, does not address what's causing your problems and contributes to poor health.
- **Use care when taking medications.** Although some over-the-counter drugs may provide temporary relief from excessive worry, they may not solve underlying problems and tensions. Before you take these drugs for an



extended period of time, see your doctor for an evaluation. If you take prescription medication to manage worry and anxiety, remember to take these medications exactly as prescribed and talk to your doctor if you find yourself needing more medication to achieve the same effect.

- **Get preventive health care.** Regular checkups can prevent disease by catching problems early and addressing them before they get worse.
- **Spend time with friends and family.** People who give and receive support regularly tend to have fewer health problems and improved coping skills.
- **Develop a daily routine.** Within reason, try to wake up, eat, go to sleep and do other usual tasks at the same time every day to help you stay in control of your life.
- **Pace yourself.** If possible, do not overextend yourself or plan too many tasks in one day to keep your day manageable.

Tips on making positive changes

Here are some techniques you can use to help you make successful lifestyle changes:

- **Set realistic goals.** When thinking about setting goals, make sure that they are within your reach. Be mindful of your finances, schedule, interests and other personal affairs. Many people forget about these important factors, and, as a result, set unrealistic goals for themselves.

- **Be specific and put it in writing.** When thinking about your goals, be as exact as possible. People who set specific goals are more likely to succeed. Write down exactly what you want to achieve and post it in a place where you will see it every day. This will remind you what you're trying to accomplish.
- **Develop an action plan.** Create a timeline outlining the steps toward your goal. Set deadlines for all steps and cross them off as you go. Sometimes, just crossing things off and watching your list get smaller can give you a sense of accomplishment and help keep you going.
- **Believe in yourself.** Stay positive about your progress. Share your goal with a friend and ask him/her to help keep your spirits up.
- **Reward yourself.** Acknowledge your achievements, even the small ones. Reaching a goal takes hard work, and you should be proud of your efforts.
- **Develop a plan to address roadblocks.** It is not uncommon to reach a point in your action plan where you're no longer seeing progress and are reverting to old patterns. To avoid frustration and stay on track, write down your plan to prevent discouragement and resume healthy habits as soon as possible. Your hard work will pay off!

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