

Tips for Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Developed in collaboration with the mental health centers of NBHP and FBHP & the Client and Family Advisory Board

- 1. Learn about anxiety.** Stress and worry are a part of everyone's life, but at times anxiety can become dysfunctional and get in the way of having the life you want. Engaging in therapy and practicing the skills you learn can help you manage anxiety and live your life more fully. Be patient, don't give up.
- 2. Effective therapies** are available to treat anxiety disorders. Your therapist will help you understand your anxiety, and learn breathing and thinking skills to confront the situations that cause anxiety. Psychotherapy is the first choice for treatment of generalized anxiety disorder. Medications may be an option if therapy alone has not been helpful enough in decreasing your symptoms.
- 3. Avoidance can make anxiety worse.** People who struggle with anxiety often avoid anxiety by seeking constant reassurance from others or avoiding anxiety provoking experiences. When you confront the feelings of anxiety, you may realize that you can tolerate anxiety better than you thought and learn to feel more in control of your behaviors. Over time, you can find reassurance within yourself and be empowered to face your fears.
- 4. Practice anxiety management strategies.** Practice the skills you learn in therapy regularly, even when you are feeling good, in order to be prepared for when anxiety is at its worst:
 - **Breathing.** Practice breathing exercises daily in order to reduce physical sensations of anxiety. Type "diaphragmatic breathing" in Youtube to watch videos that teach proper technique.
 - **Thinking skills.** Begin noticing your thoughts. People with anxiety tend to tell themselves some pretty scary things. Work with your therapist on learning skills to be aware of your thinking and how it fuels your anxiety. You will learn to use your thoughts to deal with anxiety, not to avoid it. Accept that you cannot control everything. Evaluate how realistic and accurate your thoughts really are: Is it really as bad as I think? What does the evidence say?
 - **Self-monitoring.** Keep a journal or use a smart phone app to increase awareness of your patterns of anxiety. What triggers your anxiety? You may find that there are certain situations (family, school, work) or even certain substances, (caffeine, medications, illegal drugs) can make anxiety worse. By paying attention to triggers and writing them down, you learn to recognize and manage your reactions.
 - **Scheduling worry can reduce worry throughout the day.** Talk with your therapist about setting aside 30 min a day for worrying. Choose one topic to think about and focus on that one until the end. Don't bounce around from areas of worry. Do this activity in a quiet place, such as an office. Do not practice this in your bedroom. Your bedroom should be a relaxing place free from worry.
 - **Stress management techniques** such as meditation, mindfulness, and aerobic exercise can help people with anxiety disorders calm themselves and may enhance the effects of therapy. Take a time out when you need to by listening to music, using relaxation skills, etc.
- 5. Creating a healthy lifestyle** is important in reducing stress and increasing balance in your body and mind. Limit alcohol and caffeine, which can aggravate anxiety. Eat well-balanced meals (don't skip meals), get enough sleep, exercise daily. Make sure you have regular medical care. Ask your primary care provider if your anxiety could be affecting your physical health or vice versa.
- 6. Create the support you need.** Talk with family, friends and teachers about the anxiety you or your child is facing. Learn to ask for help when feeling overwhelmed. Sharing problems and successes with others in a self-help or support group may be helpful. Remember that humor and laughter goes a long way. Volunteering is a great way to get involved, creating a broader support network and feeling good about what you do for others.
- 7. Set personal goals.** You can learn to manage your anxiety and have a full and productive life. Use the skills you are learning to move towards the things that are important to you, and try not to let anxiety hold you back. Do your best. Perfection isn't possible, be proud of yourself for moving in the right direction.

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Resources for Clients

Helping your Anxious Child: A Step by Step Guide for Parents (Second Edition) by Ronald Rapee, Ann Wignall, Susan Spence, Vanessa Cobham and Heidi Lyneham (2008).

Barlow, D. H. & Craske, M. G. (2006). Mastery of Your Anxiety and Panic: Workbook (Fourth Edition)

National Institute for Mental Health, "What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?"

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad/index.shtml>

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

<http://www.adaa.org/>