



MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRE MANITOBA

## Tips for Wellness | Calming Anxious Reactions

**Everyone has times when they feel anxious.** This is a human emotion. Typically, anxiousness is a reaction to something that we think will be harmful or potentially stressful. We may worry in anticipation of the event or situation and this causes anxiety in us to rise. Sometimes the concern is realistic but at other times it is our fearful thoughts which escalate a state of anxiousness. Anxiety emotions, in themselves, are important because they tell us when something is not quite right or that we are facing a danger. In emergencies our “fight or flight” response button is pushed. This is a deeply rooted survival response that keeps us safe and alive.

A state of anxiousness, however, can be activated by something small like forgetting where we put our keys or not remembering a phone number or a name. Sometimes anxiousness is generated in anticipation of something new, like starting a job or speaking in front of a group. Fear of these experiences can make a person feel vulnerable or helpless and then raise the level of anxiety.

If we have experienced difficult or traumatic situations in our past, the feelings of anxiousness may be overwhelming, even when there really isn't an actual threat to us in the present. If we find ourselves in a state of frequent anxiousness we may need seek out supportive professional counselling, peer support, and/or see our doctor.

### Signs of Anxiety:

- Feeling nervous, or tense
- Racing thoughts
- Feeling that something bad might happen
- Short of breath, heart racing
- Trouble relaxing or enjoying
- Irritable or easily annoyed



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## Tips to Reduce Anxiousness:

- Be kind to yourself and use gentle self-talk! Normalize the anxiety by reminding yourself that you are not alone and that others also experience anxiousness. Tell yourself that you are not broken and that feeling anxious is perfectly ok. This kind of self talk can bring the level of anxiousness down to a manageable level or may even resolve the anxiety in the moment completely.
- Find a place where you can be quiet and just breath. This can be anywhere indoors or outdoors. Being in nature like a park or a garden is nice but not necessary. The main thing is to find somewhere where you feel safe and where you can take a few minutes to regroup.
- Pay attention to what is happening in your body. Notice where you are feeling tense or agitated in your body. Try not to resist the tension – instead place your hand on that part of your body or imagine breathing into this area. Send thoughts of acceptance and reassurance to your stressed body.
- Pay attention to what is happening in your head! Are your thoughts making the anxiety worse? Are you thinking about the worst outcome? Can you be more realistic about what might actually happen?
- Call or friend or a trusted family member and share. Make sure to choose a person to talk to who won't escalate the anxiousness. Think about someone who can offer reassuring and practical feedback or who can simply listen.

## On an On-Going Basis, You Can:

- Learn about techniques that are useful and proven in reducing anxiety. CBT is a research based and accredited treatment for generalized anxiety, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and more general anxiousness. CBT focuses on thinking, feeling and behaving and is effective in changing over to realistic thoughts that decrease worry and fear.
- Have about 30 minutes of light exercise several times a week can go a long way to help you feel less anxious.

- Talk to a trusted friend, family member, or professional counsellor or peer supporter about your anxiety. Talking with someone and supporting others is much better than being isolated.
- Have a plan. Keep in mind ways that you know will work to calm you down. Count slowly to 10, make a hot drink, go for a walk, or play with a pet.

### ***Resources at MHERC***

MHERC has many books, printed materials and audio recordings to help with anxiety reducing awareness and skills. A few of these are:

**THE ANXIETY CURE: LIVE A LIFE FREE FROM PANIC** | Klaus Bernhardt, 2018

**THE RELAXATION & STRESS REDUCTION WORKBOOK**

Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, Matthew McKay, 2008

**THE ANXIETY WORKBOOK FOR TEENS: ACTIVITIES TOO HELP YOU DEAL WITH ANXIETY & WORRY** | Lisa M. Schab, 2008

### ***Resources in Community***

**THE ANXIETY DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF MANITOBA** | 204-925-0600

**MSS – PEER TO PEER SUPPORT** | Individual and Family | 204-786-1616

**SENECA WARM LINE** | 204-942-9276