

Anxiety

Anxiety is an emotion often characterized as feelings of worry, uneasiness, or fear. Anxiety often produces physical symptoms similar to a stress response, such as increased blood pressure, sweating, dizziness, or muscle tension. Anxiety is a normal human experience, but intense or chronic anxiety may be a sign of a mental health condition.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is an emotion that most people experience occasionally. Anxiety is often described as feelings of worry, fear, or intense stress. Although often unpleasant, anxiety has developed to serve a purpose. Feelings of fear or worry can help protect us from danger by warning us of something threatening in our lives. However, sometimes these warning signals become too intense for the situation. For example, feeling extreme fear or worry before starting a big exam does not serve the purpose of protecting us from danger. Rather, it may actually decrease performance because anxiety can increase the potential for forgetfulness and distractibility, and cause other cognitive impairments.

Is it stress or anxiety?

Stress and anxiety can feel very similar and it can be difficult to tell them apart. Typically, when a person feels stressed, there is usually a specific, external trigger. For example, being worried about starting a new job is stressful, but after a few days it starts feeling more comfortable, and it continues to feel more and more comfortable as time moves on.

Anxiety tends to be more complex. A person who lives with anxiety may worry about a specific event, but also spend a lot of time worrying about things that are in the past or might possibly occur in the future. Anxiety can feel like being consumed with the thought “What if...?”. For example, a person with anxiety who is starting a new job, might feel stressed about the transition, but then also worry about what would happen if they get fired. How would they pay their bills? What if they can’t afford rent and get evicted? What if they have to drop out of college because they can’t afford tuition and can never pursue their career goals? Or, if feeling stuck in the past, the person may ruminate about a difficult experience they had when they started a new job a few years back. They may replay the unpleasant experience in their mind over and over, criticizing themselves.

In general, stress is short-lived while anxiety tends to have a more consistent and persistent presence. Anxiety can make you feel like you are in constant danger, with your mind and body prepared to run or fight at any moment.



Anxiety Disorders

Many people may experience anxiety and do not have an anxiety disorder. However, if a person has experienced long-term chronic anxiety that feels unmanageable or is negatively impacting aspects of their life, it is possible that they are experiencing an anxiety disorder. There are many different types of anxiety disorders, including Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Social Anxiety, Panic Disorder, Phobias, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. To learn more, visit <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/how-do-i-know-if-i-have-an-anxiety-disorder/>

What does an anxiety disorder look and feel like?

According to the Jed Foundation, an anxiety disorder can feel and look like many different things. The following list and more are available at <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/how-do-i-know-if-i-have-an-anxiety-disorder/>

Those with an anxiety disorder may have anxiety that has lasted at least six months and it may feel like:

- You’re in danger most of the time or you worry something bad is going to happen to you. You think about and feel these things most days of the week. Your fears are bigger than the situation. You worry about failing a test, but you also worry that failing the test means you’ll never do well in any class and you’ll never be able to graduate.
- Your thoughts are critical and repetitive. Maybe you constantly think negative thoughts about yourself or

you're stuck in an endless worry loop about things that may never happen.

- Your fears and worries are getting in the way of your everyday life

When you have an anxiety disorder, you may behave differently than you used to. There are different types of anxiety disorders, and it's possible to have just one or a couple that overlap. The following list of behaviors and more are available at <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/how-do-i-know-if-i-have-an-anxiety-disorder/>

- You may lash out, lose your temper, or feel angry most of the time. Maybe you snap at your friends or family.
- You may have panic attacks.
- You may start avoiding certain situations. Maybe you stay in your room because you don't want to go to a party or hang out with people, or you skip class or don't show up to an exam because you're convinced you're going to fail.
- You get tired a lot or have trouble falling or staying asleep.
- You may turn to alcohol or other substances because they feel like a quick way to turn down the thoughts in your head or calm your body.
- You may spend most of your time playing games on your phone because it distracts you from your worries.
- You may feel restless or have trouble focusing or paying attention.

How common are anxiety disorders?

You are not alone if you have experienced anxiety. Anxiety is one of the most common mental health conditions. According to the results of the 2020 Boynton Health Survey, **41% of Anoka Technical College students have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder** at some point in their lifetime.

Seeking Help & Support

If you are experiencing anxiety, suspect a possible anxiety disorder, or live with a diagnosed anxiety disorder, there are many sources of help and support available to you. Some may choose to see a mental health practitioner, such as a counselor or therapist, or a medical practitioner. Some may choose to seek self-help resources or support from peer groups.

As an Anoka Technical College student, a great place to start is with a college counselor. Counseling services are available to students at no charge. See the box title "Counseling Services" for additional details.

Additional Resources

There are many resources available on stress management and related topics. Check out the following resources available from the Jed Foundation (jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center).

- [Can I Be Anxious Without Having an Anxiety Disorder?](#)
- [How Do I Know If I Have an Anxiety Disorder?](#)
- [How is Anxiety Treated?](#)
- [How Can I Manage My Anxiety?](#)
- [How to Build an Anxiety Toolkit](#)
- [What Is Social Anxiety?](#)
- [Six Ways to Stop a Panic Attack](#)
- [How to Help a Friend or Loved One with Anxiety](#)

For self-help resources, check out the information available from the Jed Foundation, including the articles titled "How Can I Manage my Anxiety?" and "How to Build an Anxiety Toolkit" linked in the "Additional Resources" Section.

There are also many valuable resources available off campus. Visit the Anoka Technical College student resources webpage to view the content listed under the section "Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Resources" found here: <https://www.anokatech.edu/student-services/student-basic-needs-resources/>

If in crisis, contact the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988. This is a free and confidential service that provides support to people in distress and information regarding crisis resources. If there is immediate risk of harm to self or others, call 911.

Counseling Services

Counseling services are available to support Anoka Technical College students. A counselor can talk with you about any concerns or difficulties you are facing, provide support, and help in developing strategies and skills to promote wellness and goal achievement. Counseling services are confidential and free. You are encouraged to reach out for support.

To learn more about counseling services, visit: <https://www.anokatech.edu/student-services/counseling-services/>

To schedule an appointment with a counselor, visit the weblink above or call 763-576-7860.