



# A Healthy Outlook!

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## Why Am I So Anxious?

Every human being feels anxiety on occasion; it is a part of life. All of us know what it is like to feel worry, nervousness, fear, and concern. We feel nervous when we have to give a speech, go for a job interview, or walk into our boss's office for the annual performance appraisal. We know it is normal to feel a surge of fear when we unexpectedly see a photo of a snake or look down from the top of a tall building. Most of us manage these kinds of anxious feelings fairly well and are able to carry on with our lives without much difficulty. These feelings don't disrupt our lives.

But millions of people (an estimated 15 percent of the population) suffer from devastating and constant anxiety that severely affects their lives, sometimes resulting in living in highly restricted ways. They may experience panic attacks, phobias, extreme shyness, obsessive thoughts, and compulsive behaviors.

The feeling of anxiety is a constant and dominating force that disrupts their lives. Some people become prisoners in their own homes, unable to leave to work, drive, or visit the grocery store. For these people, anxiety is much more than just an occasional wave of apprehension.

### Types of Anxiety Disorders

An anxiety disorder affects a person's behavior, thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. The most common anxiety disorders include the following:



♦ **Social anxiety or social phobia** is a fear of being around other people. People who suffer from this disorder always feel self-conscious around others. They have the feeling that everyone is watching them and staring at them, being

critical in some way. Because the anxiety is so painful, they learn to stay away from social situations and avoid other people. Some people eventually need to be alone at all times, in a room with the door closed. The feeling is pervasive and constant and even happens with people they know.

People who have social anxiety know that their thoughts and fears are not rational. They are aware that others are not actually judging or evaluating them at every moment. But this knowledge

does not make the feelings disappear.

♦ **Panic disorder** is a condition in which a person has panic attacks without warning. According to the National Institute of Mental Health,



about 5 percent of the adult U.S. population suffers from panic attacks. Some experts say that this number is actually higher, since many people experience panic attacks but never receive treatment.

### Common symptoms of panic:

- ♦ Racing or pounding heart
- ♦ Trembling
- ♦ Sweaty palms
- ♦ Feelings of terror
- ♦ Chest pains or heaviness in the chest
- ♦ Dizziness and lightheadedness
- ♦ Fear of dying
- ♦ Fear of going crazy
- ♦ Fear of losing control
- ♦ Feeling unable to catch one's breath
- ♦ Tingling in the hands, feet, legs, or arms

A panic attack typically lasts several minutes and is extremely upsetting and frightening. In some cases, panic attacks last longer than a few minutes or strike several times in a short time period. A panic attack is often followed by feelings of depression and helplessness. Most people who have

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experienced panic say that the greatest fear is that the panic attack will happen again. Many times, the person who has a panic attack does not know what caused it. It seems to have come “out of the blue.” At other times, people report that they were feeling extreme stress or had encountered difficult times and were not surprised that they had a panic attack.

◆ **Generalized anxiety disorder** is quite common, affecting an estimated 3 to 4 percent of the population. This disorder fills a person’s life with worry, anxiety, and fear. People who have this disorder are always thinking and dwelling on the “what ifs” of every situation. They feel like there is no way out of the vicious cycle of anxiety and worry. These people often become depressed about life and their inability to stop worrying.

People who have generalized anxiety usually do not avoid situations, and they do not generally have panic attacks. They can become incapacitated by an inability to shut off the mind and are overcome with feelings of worry, dread, fatigue, and a loss of interest in life. They usually realize that these feelings are irrational, but the feelings also are very real. The person’s mood can change from day to day, or even hour to hour. Feelings of anxiety and mood swings become a pattern that severely disrupts the quality of life.

People with generalized anxiety disorder often have physical symptoms, including headaches, irritability, frus-

tration, trembling, inability to concentrate, and sleep disturbances. They also may have symptoms of social phobia and panic disorder.

Other types of anxiety disorders include the following:

- ◆ **Phobia**—fear of a specific object or situation, e.g., flying on an airplane.
- ◆ **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)**—a system of ritualized behaviors or obsessions that are driven by anxious thoughts.
- ◆ **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**—severe anxiety that is triggered by memories of a past traumatic experience.
- ◆ **Agoraphobia**—a disabling fear that prevents one from leaving home or another safe place.

### Treatment Options

Most people who suffer from anxiety disorders begin to feel better when they receive the proper treatment. It



can be difficult to identify the correct treatment, however, because each person’s anxiety is caused by a unique set of factors. It can be frustrating for the client when treatment is not immediately successful or takes

longer than he or she had hoped. Some clients feel better after a few weeks or months of treatment, while others may

need a year or more. If a person has an anxiety disorder in combination with another disorder (such as alcoholism and depression), treatment is more complicated and takes longer.

While a treatment plan must be specifically designed for each individual, there are a number of standard approaches. Mental health professionals who specialize in treating anxiety most often use a combination of the following treatments. There is no single correct approach.

◆ **Cognitive Therapy:** The client learns how to identify and change unproductive thought patterns by observing his or her feelings and learning to separate realistic from unrealistic thoughts.

◆ **Behavior Therapy:** This treatment helps the client alter and control unwanted behavior.

◆ **Systematic desensitization**, a type of behavior therapy, is often used to help people with phobias and OCD. The client is exposed to anxiety-producing stimuli one small step at a time, gradually increasing his or her tolerance to situations that have produced disabling anxiety.

◆ **Relaxation Training:** Many people with anxiety disorders benefit from self-hypnosis, guided visualization, and biofeedback. Relaxation training is often part of psychotherapy.

◆ **Medication:** Antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications can help restore chemical imbalances that cause symptoms of anxiety. This is an effective treatment for many people, especially in combination with psychotherapy.

The treatment for an anxiety disorder depends on the severity and length of the problem. The client’s willingness to actively participate in treatment also is an important factor. When a person with panic attacks is motivated to try new behaviors and practice new skills and techniques, he or she can learn to change the way the brain responds to familiar thoughts and feelings that have previously caused anxiety. ◆

Adapted from an article by Fran Kooistra, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist, in *Therapists Newsletter*. Used with permission.

## “The Present”

Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out every cent, of course! Each of us has such a bank. Its name is TIME.

Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off as lost whatever of this you have failed to invest for a good purpose. It carries no balance. It allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new

account for you. Each night it burns the day’s deposits; the loss is yours.

There is no going back. There is no drawing against the “tomorrow.” You must live in the present on today’s deposits. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in health, happiness, and success! The clock is running. Make the most of the day.

Treasure every moment that you have! And remember that time waits for no one. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That’s why it’s called, “the present.”

—Anonymous

# How to Do a Spring Health Checkup

Spring cleaning is an important time to get rid of the old and perform an inventory of what you accumulated over the past year and long winter. However, spring cleaning can mean more to you than discarding ancient garage or attic junk. It also should be about getting a clean bill of health. If you do not wait until an emergency arises to contact the physician, chances are the early stages of many ailments can be pinpointed and treated accordingly. The key is to establish a regular checkup routine and go into the check-up prepared.

## Here are some ways to do it:

- ♥ Make a list of any chronic or family health issues such as high blood pressure, cholesterol, or back pain. Review your list and write down the last time a health-care provider discussed each of these with you. Be honest. Six months is the maximum time anyone with a chronic health problem in need of medical care should go without a checkup.
- ♥ Review your immunizations. Are they up to date? Especially look at the

last time you had a tetanus shot. If your answer is “I don’t remember,” it is a good time to review your records and inquire.

- ♥ Clean out your medicine cabinet. Take out all of your prescribed medications and bring them with you to your spring health checkup. This is a great way for you and your health-care provider to determine if you still need the prescribed medications or if there are alternatives available. It is also a great way to review any outdated prescription or over-the-counter medications that have been hiding in the back of your cabinet. They may need to be renewed or just tossed. (Note: please check instructions for your medications or speak with your pharmacist or doctor about the best way to dispose of unused medications).

- ♥ Examine your health maintenance testing needs, such as mammogram, colonoscopy, and bone density scan. Think about other areas of specialty that you may need to take care of, such as visiting the dentist or the

eye doctor. We all remember to take our cars in for a tune-up. Think of these preventive screenings in the same way.

- ♥ Make an appointment with your primary care physician. Let him or her know that you are bringing in your medications and want to review your health needs and schedule an appropriate amount of time for your visit. Make sure nutrition and exercise are discussed that pertain to your individual needs. Make your spring health visit an annual event to help keep your health and wellness activities organized. ♦

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**“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”**

— Plato

## Multiple Sclerosis

### What is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system mistakes the nervous system as a threat and begins attacking the protective covering of nerves. Scar tissue replaces areas where the myelin has been lost in the brain or spinal cord, and the scar tissue, or plaque, can interfere with many of the individual’s bodily functions and movements.

### Who Gets MS?

MS is generally diagnosed in young adults between the ages of 20 and 40, and is twice as common in women as men.

While each person who gets MS is affected differently, these are some of the most common symptoms:

- \*Numbness or tingling

- \*Unusual fatigue, weakness, and exhaustion
- \*Vision problems
- \*Poor coordination or difficulty walking
- \*Slurred speech
- \*Bladder problems

### Is There a Cure for MS?

There is no known cure for MS, but there are treatments that can be helpful to some patients in slowing the progression of their symptoms.

### How Does MS Affect Families?

Studies have shown that children of parents with MS “felt more responsibility and obligation than children of healthy parents. They also exhibited more yielding behavior, more fear and anxiety related to states of illness, a

greater sense of burden, and a greater degree of anger” than their peers (Yahav, Vosburgh, & Miller, 2005).

### Where Can I Go to Get More Information About MS or Living with MS?

A new local nonprofit organization, dreamMakerS, founded by a Montgomery County Public Schools teacher, has been formed to address the needs of those living with MS and those who love them.

Please visit their website for information and resources for parents and children living with MS, as well as for information on how to get involved: [www.msdreammakers.org](http://www.msdreammakers.org). ♦

## Are You Concerned About an Employee?

Sometimes supervisors worry about an employee who might appear stressed or sad, anxious or distracted. What is the best way to approach this employee to demonstrate your concern in a caring and respectful manner? We recommend sitting down privately with your staff person and sharing your concerns by outlining what you have observed and letting him or her know that you are worried.

Let the employee know that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to provide him or her with confidential assessment, counseling, and referral services. Look for information about the EAP on our website <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap/> as well as in our brochure. We would be glad to send brochures to your school or office and meet with you and your leadership team to talk about how we might best be able to assist your particular staff members. Call us at 240-314-1040.

## Ask the EAP

**Q.** Why do supervisors refer employees to the EAP?

**A.** Supervisors might refer an employee for a number of reasons. Sometimes, a referral is made because an employee is dealing with a personal issue but it has not affected his or her job performance. The supervisor just wants to be sure the employee knows about the program should he or she need support. An EAP referral can also occur when a supervisor refers an employee during the course of a discussion about performance deficiencies. The supervisor wants to offer help and hopes that if an employee addresses underlying personal issues then his or her performance will improve.



## Upcoming Events

### MCPS Cancer Support Group

**April 11,  
May 9, and  
June 13 —**

**We will meet on the second Monday of the month at CESC, room #240 from 12:30–1:30 p.m. For more information, please contact Debra Tipton on Outlook or by phone at 240-314-1040.**



## *A Healthy Outlook!*

*To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.*



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You may contact us or send your questions and comments to  
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Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.