

## Tips for Overcoming Anxiety

### Washington State Employee Assistance Program

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*Anxiety is a physiological, behavioral and psychological reaction to stressful situations. It can include feelings of apprehension, uneasiness, dread or fear over a real or imagined threat to your well-being. Physical symptoms may include rapid heart beat, muscle tension, queasiness, dry mouth or sweating. It may also affect our ability to work, express yourself, or deal with certain situations. Some degree of anxiety is normal. For example, mild anxiety may prompt many people to practice for an upcoming presentation or finish an assigned task. However, when anxiety is brought on by a traumatic event, it can become overwhelming, and it can get in the way of daily life.*

Following are some helpful tips to assist you in coping with and overcoming feelings of anxiety.

- **Seek out someone to talk to.** Talk about your fears and anxieties with someone you trust. Talking about it can help diminish it.
- **Maintain your daily routine.** Sticking with your regular routine after a traumatic event can be a comfort and help you heal.
- **Limit exposure to media coverage of a traumatic event.** Avoid watching TV coverage of a traumatic event over and over again. Also avoid excessive radio or newspaper coverage of the event. Staying informed about the event is good, but too much exposure to it can re-traumatize you and increase anxiety.
- **Get regular exercise.** Almost all exercise relieves anxiety. Exercise may include walking, jogging, swimming, horseback riding, working in your yard, or any other activity that helps reduce stress. Twenty to thirty minutes of deep relaxation exercises per day (often involving slow, deep breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation or visualization) can also help reduce anxiety.
- **Eat right.** Eat healthy foods, eat at regular times, and don't skip meals.
- **Get plenty of rest.** If you find yourself unable to sleep through the night, try to take shorter rests. If you can't fall asleep at all, try lying down in a dark room and closing your eyes.
- **Limit caffeine intake.** Too much caffeine or alcohol can increase anxiety. Instead drink water, decaffeinated coffee, herbal teas, caffeine-free colas or non-alcoholic beverages. Also avoid chocolate.
- **Avoid alcohol and nicotine.** Alcohol and nicotine contain chemicals which can cause anxiety. Alcohol and nicotine might seem to relax you, but in the long run they actually worsen anxiety and depression.
- **Participate in social activities.** Getting out of the house and engaging in activities, such as going out to dinner, dancing or the movies, can help reduce stress and anxiety.

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- **Admit you have symptoms.** Be honest with yourself. Slow down and make note of how you really feel. As you notice feelings of anxiety come up, try to figure out what is really bothering you. Don't hide feelings of stress or anxiety behind family or work responsibilities. You must first admit something is wrong before you can begin to heal.
- **Confront your anxieties a little at a time.** Face your fears slowly and little by little, until you feel comfortable taking on more. Anxiety is a real feeling, but it can be overcome in time and with patience.
- **Help others.** Consider doing volunteer work to help others, instead of just sending money to your local charity. The act of helping others can empower you and help you feel less helpless and vulnerable.
- **Avoid trying to do too much.** Taking on too much or over-committing yourself will increase stress and anxiety. Go easy on yourself. Delegate as much as you can to others, and don't commit to things you know you don't have time for.
- **Plan ahead for upcoming events.** Anticipate and prepare yourself for upcoming events or situations you think may cause you anxiety. Then image yourself in the situation feeling calm, confident, and in control.
- **Limit your worrying.** Give yourself 30 minutes a day to think about your concerns and what you can do about them. Pick a time and place to do your worrying, and keep it to the same time and place every day. Concentrate on what is "really" happening and avoid dwelling on what "might" happen. During the rest of the day, try not to allow "worrying" thoughts to enter your mind.
- **Repeat positive statements to yourself.** Think of positive statements you can say to yourself which help you feel less anxious. Then when you begin to feel anxious, repeat those statements over and over to yourself to help calm you down.

### Additional Help

If you find none of the tips listed are helping you, you may need to seek professional help. Meeting with a counselor you trust can help you learn to manage your stress and anxiety effectively. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to talk with you and assist you in finding a counselor that would best suit your needs. EAP is here to help you; please call us.