

Information Sheet **Sexual Health and Anxiety**

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a mental and physical reaction to perceived threats. It is a normal and healthy part of life, and in small doses it can even be helpful. Anxiety can help to protect us and focuses our attention on problems to be solved. But when anxiety is too severe or occurs too frequently it can be unbearable.

Is it anxiety?

Anxiety symptoms can range. You may experience one or a combination of the following:

Fatigue, restlessness and trouble sleeping;
Poor concentration;
Muscle tension;
Irritability and agitation;
Headaches;
Upset stomach;
Feeling of unease;
Panic attacks;
Temper tantrums;
Increased heart rate;
Feeling that your body temperature is rising.

Anxiety and Sexual Health

Keep in mind that your sexual health is broad, and involves your overall physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. There are several factors that could possibly impact existing anxiety or bring on new anxiety. Not everyone will experience anxiety as the result of a sexual health issue, but some may.

Some sexual health issues that can trigger or deepen existing anxiety can include:

- A recent diagnosis of a sexually transmitted infection;
- Thinking about having sex but not sure what to expect;
- Being a victim or survival of sexual violence;
- Exclusion because of your identity and/or sexual orientation;
- Pain from an illness or disability;
- Struggling with body image and self-esteem.

What are the impacts of anxiety on sexual health?

Anxiety can also impact your sexual health in a variety of ways, such as;

- Anxiety can cause disconnection in communication, intimacy, and personal life balance.
- Anxiety can cause individuals to worry more about their sexual lives and behaviours.
- Research has shown that the presence of anxiety tends to be associated with low sexual desire and arousal.
- Anxiety may limit sexual arousal, subsequently impacting desire and frequency of orgasm.
- Medication used to treat anxiety and anxiety disorders may further impact sexual desire and arousal, as well as delay or cause the absence of orgasm.



Treatments for Anxiety

Treatments for anxiety include different therapies and approaches, from professional counselling and support to self-care.

Professional counsellors and health care professionals offer cognitive behaviour therapy, narrative therapy, and medications may be prescribed.

Other effective approaches to reduce anxiety may include:

- Mindfulness and meditation
- Faith and spirituality
- Exercise
- Art therapy

Helpful Tips

If you suffer from anxiety or are feeling anxious some of the following tips may be helpful:

- Listen to your favorite music;
- Spend time with pets;
- Build a support network;
- Be flexible, but try to maintain a normal routine;
- Be creative. Make arts and crafts;
- Take care of your body. Eat well and stay hydrated (drink lots of water).
- Try to think positive, find positive distractions and stay in the moment.

Where can I go for help?

If you are feeling anxious or believe you suffer from an anxiety disorder contact:

Your healthcare provider or teen health centre.

Your schools, parents, guardian or a trusted adult.

Mental Health Crisis Line

1-888-429-8167 (toll-free)

Available 24 hours, seven days a week.

In Cumberland County:

1-844-855-6688

Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868 (toll-free)

Available 24 hours, seven days a week.

References

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Thank you to the youth who contributed their feedback to this information sheet, and to our friends at the Amherst Teen Health Centre.

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