

TIPS FOR HEALTHY LIVING

Our lifestyle can have a big impact on how we feel. When we don't take care of ourselves, we can experience a number of problems, including sleep difficulties, fatigue, low energy, trouble concentrating, and increased tension and stress. These problems can leave us vulnerable to anxiety. Making healthy choices will help you feel better. Remember, the goal of developing a healthy lifestyle is **not** to eliminate anxiety (*because anxiety plays an important adaptive role – without it we would not survive*), but to help us to function at our best (for more information on anxiety, see [What is Anxiety?](#)). Having a healthy lifestyle puts us in a better position for managing anxiety. Here are some ideas for building a healthy lifestyle.

→ Set a Routine.

Establish a routine by setting specific times for meals, work, housework, quiet time, and bedtime. We feel more secure when there is some predictability to our day. It also helps us get things done and reminds us to take time for ourselves. Having a routine can help you to set the stage to better manage your anxiety.

→ Become Active.

Regular exercise can have a positive impact on both your emotional and physical health. In fact, exercise is one of the **most powerful** tools for managing stress and anxiety. However, it can be hard to start a regular exercise program. So, start small and work your way up. Aim for at least 20 minutes of physical exercise three to four times a week. You'll be more likely to stick with a program if you choose something you enjoy (such as skiing, hiking, gardening, or dancing). Try joining a gym, signing up for an exercise class, or finding a workout buddy. Find little ways to increase your physical activity. For example, park further away from the door, or take the stairs. For some ideas on how to set goals around exercise, see [Guide to Goal Setting](#).

→ Eat Healthy.

Having a well-balanced and healthy diet can make you feel better. Eat consistently throughout the day and don't skip meals. Your diet should include a variety of foods. Wondering how to eat healthier? Try to reduce your salt and sugar intake, eat more fruits and vegetables, and drink more water. Aim for three meals a day and one to two snacks. For more ideas on how to improve your diet talk to your doctor or a dietician, or refer to the [Canada Food Guide](#).

→ **Get a Good Night's Sleep.**

Sleep difficulties can contribute to anxiety problems and make it difficult to cope. Aim to get about seven to eight hours of sleep a night. However, this is just an estimate. People differ on how much sleep they need and this amount can change with age. If you are experiencing sleep problems talk to your doctor. For more information on dealing with sleep problems see [Getting a Good Night's Sleep](#).

→ **Establish Social Supports.**

It is important to have people in your life that you can count on. It helps to be able to talk to a friend when you have had a bad day or are struggling with a problem. Having a good social network has been linked to greater well-being. Having at least one good supportive friend can make a difference. Unfortunately, it can be hard to make friends. For more information, see [Self-Help Strategies for Social Anxiety \(Meeting New People\)](#) and [Effective Communication - Improving Your Social Skills](#).

→ **Learn to Relax.**

Using relaxation strategies can help lower your overall tension and stress levels. However, relaxation is more than just sitting on the couch watching television. What makes a difference is “deep” relaxation, which is the opposite of what your body experiences when it is under stress. For more information about various relaxation exercises, see [How to do Calm Breathing](#) and [How to do Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#).

→ **Manage Your Time.**

Learning to manage your time more effectively can reduce stress. Use a day planner to schedule your activities. This will help you see if you're taking on too much, and help you make time for the things you need to do. Remember to make sure to schedule some time for relaxation and fun activities each day.

→ **Reduce Stimulants.**

Excessive caffeine can lead to sleep problems and heightened anxiety. Try to reduce your caffeine intake. This includes coffee, some teas, soda, and chocolate. If you drink a lot of caffeinated beverages, it's better to gradually reduce the amount of caffeine that you have every day. Smoking is also a strong stimulant. In addition to the health benefits, quitting smoking may also leave you less prone to anxiety.

→ **Avoid Alcohol and Drugs.**

It is NEVER a good idea to use alcohol or drugs to help you cope with anxiety – this just leads to more problems. If you have problems with anxiety, try to avoid using drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with negative feelings. If you think that you may have a problem with drugs or alcohol, talk to your doctor.

→ **Get a check-up.**

Make sure you are taking care of your body. See a doctor for regular check-ups.

→ **Solve Problems.**

Problems are a common source of stress and can contribute to anxiety. Therefore, it is important to start identifying and dealing with your problems. However, it can be hard to know which problems to tackle and exactly how to go about solving them. For more information, see [How to Solve Daily Life Problems](#).

→ **Reduce Stress.**

Sometimes life's demands become too much. Stress can have a negative impact on your health. Look for ways to reduce stress. Deal with problems, lean on supports, and take time for self-care. For instance, plan some time for yourself each day to read a book, go for a walk, watch a favorite TV program, or relax! You can also reduce stress by giving yourself a little extra time to get to places so that you're not rushing. Try giving yourself an extra 5 minutes – it can make a big difference!



HELPFUL HINTS:

- **Start Small.** Making small changes can have a large impact on your life. Don't try to do everything all at once. Instead, pick one or two things and try them consistently. When you're ready, try adding a new strategy.
- **Set Goals.** Identify some things you want to work on and set some realistic goals. For more information, see [Guide for Goal Setting](#).
- **Be Patient.** These strategies can take time to have a positive effect. Hang in there and stick with it!