What you can do

**Self-Treatment**
If your anxiety is not severe and doesn’t happen often, you might notice the causes and try not to avoid them. There are many excellent self-help books that offer ideas for managing anxiety.

**Counseling**
If your anxiety is frequent, severe or really interferes with your life, talk to a mental health professional.

Psychologists, social workers and counselors can help you:
- Manage anxiety, stop avoiding sources of anxiety and lessen severe anxiety episodes.
- Decrease your anxiety by challenging your thoughts about how dangerous the world is.
- Gradually expose yourself to situations you avoid until they no longer make you anxious.
- Learn relaxation exercises and other ways to get through times of high anxiety more easily.

Many people with anxiety don’t get help because they feel embarrassed or don’t see their symptoms as a sign of illness.

**Medicines**
Some nurses and doctors (including psychiatrists) can prescribe medicines to help you overcome your anxiety.
Some medicines work right away to decrease anxiety while you learn how to handle it on your own. Others take some time to start working. A health professional can help you through this waiting period.
Medicines and counseling at the same time is often the quickest, most comfortable way to get better.

What causes anxiety?

Anyone can have an anxiety disorder. But some people may be more likely to have problems than others.

**Genetics.** Research suggests that people with a family history of anxiety disorders may be more likely to develop one.

**Life experiences.** Some disorders, such as phobias and post-traumatic stress disorder, result from specific traumas.

To Learn More
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
www.adaa.org
Anxiety has different forms
Feelings of anxiety can range from uneasiness to extreme panic and fear.

**Phobias** include fear of things, such as spiders or heights; fear of situations, such as public speaking or tests; or fear of being in public places.

When the fear is excessive or significantly interferes with daily activities and relationships, a phobia becomes a disorder.

**Post-traumatic stress syndrome** is when a person continues to feel strong anxiety long after a traumatic event.

When symptoms last more than a month and interfere with daily routines and relationships, post-traumatic stress becomes a disorder.

**Generalized anxiety** is when a person feels very tense and stressed all day, every day, and worries throughout the day.

When someone worries more days than not for at least 6 months, generalized anxiety becomes a disorder.

**Obsessions** are distressing thoughts that don’t go away. Someone may follow certain behaviors (called compulsions) to try to lessen the anxiety, such as checking doors or washing hands over and over.

When obsessions or compulsions take up at least an hour each day and interfere with daily routines and relationships, they become disorders.

**Panic attacks** are sudden, overwhelming fears of being in danger, for no apparent reason. They last a few minutes to an hour.

When someone has at least 2 panic attacks and then worries for a month about having another attack, panic becomes a disorder. The person may also refuse to go places (agoraphobia) due to fear of having a panic attack in public.

**Is it a panic attack?**
If you’ve had 4 or more of these symptoms, talk to your health care provider.

**Flu-like symptoms**
- Feeling dizzy, light-headed or faint.
- Feeling hot flushes or chills.
- Increased sweating.
- Nausea or stomach cramps.
- Shaking or trembling.

**Other physical symptoms**
- Numbness or tingling in the hands, feet or around the mouth.
- Feeling that your throat is closing up, or that you can’t swallow.
- Tension, pressure or pain in your chest.
- Shortness of breath, as if you can’t get a full breath.
- Feeling your heart beat fast, pound or skip beats.

**Unusual feelings**
- Fear that you’re having a heart attack or are about to die.
- Fear that you’re going crazy and are about to lose your mind.
- Feeling that you’re watching yourself from far away, or that everything is either too vivid or not vivid enough.