

Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural reaction to uncertainty that helps us prepare for future threats.

related emotions and behaviors: worry, fear, panic, restlessness, agitation, avoidance

What it feels like

You might be **nervous, worried, or afraid.**

Things may feel **uncertain, unsafe, scary, or out of your control.**

You might feel an urgent **need to prepare for bad things** that might happen.

You may notice that **your heart is beating faster** and **your breathing is shallow or heavy.**

You might feel **dizzy or nauseous. Your muscles may be tense** and **your head might hurt.**

Why you might be feeling it

Giving birth, parenting, and being in the NICU is stressful.

When we're under stress, emotions can feel more intense.

When our pregnancies and births don't go as planned, we worry about our babies' outcomes. **We can feel powerless to fix things.** (This can be especially difficult for partners.)

When our babies are in the NICU, **we want to protect them.** We may become fearful, cautious, and hyper-aware of every threat. We may think that if we can anticipate bad things, we can keep them from happening.



Anxiety is rooted in our need to protect ourselves.



It can help us stay safe - but it can also become exhausting and overwhelming.

What it looks like

- **Being hypervigilant** - thinking you have to be on guard and prepared for anything that could happen
- **Avoiding** people, places, or things that make you feel uncomfortable or afraid
- **Reacting** to threats you didn't notice before
- **Difficulty resting** or sleeping even though you're tired and exhausted

How common is It?



- All of us experience some anxiety.
- **1 in 3** of us will have an anxiety disorder during our lifetime.
- About **1 in 5** of us will develop an anxiety disorder during pregnancy or postpartum.

Types of anxiety

We feel anxious when things are uncertain and when what we care most about is under threat.

Separation Anxiety - the distress we feel when we can't be with the people we need
- threat of not being together

Phobias - fear and worry about specific activities, things, or places - *threats from objects, situations, or environment - example: agoraphobia is the fear of being trapped someplace where you feel you can't escape*

Panic Disorder - "panic attacks"
- short, repeated, intense episodes where you have physical symptoms like shaking, sweating, dizziness, or trouble breathing
- threat from physical sensations

Social Anxiety - fear or avoidance of meeting new people or being in unfamiliar or uncomfortable social situations - *threat from people and our interactions with them*

Generalized Anxiety - chronic worry and "what if" thinking - *threat from the unknown*

Things that help

- Take a **slow, deep breath** – in through your nose and out through your mouth. Repeat. Slow, deep breathing helps calm your nervous system.
- **Notice what triggered or activated** your response and what the anxiety feels like in your body.
- Notice and **take care of your needs**. Have something to eat, drink some water, take a walk, or talk to someone you trust.
- Learn how to **recognize your feelings** and **thought patterns** so that you can respond differently to your anxiety.

Medications and therapies that can help

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (CBT)
- Medications like SSRIs and SNRIs

Talking about ANXIETY

Anxiety is common - and **anxiety disorders are temporary and treatable**. With help and support, you can feel better. If your anxiety is making you uncomfortable or keeping you from feeling the way you want to feel and doing the things you want to do, **ASK FOR HELP**.