

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of sudden or lasting uneasiness, worry, or fear that can affect daily activities and quality of life.

Causes of anxiety include:

- Pain that is not being treated or does not go away
- A history of depression or panic disorder
- Extreme fears especially about end of life
- Trouble breathing
- Issues with the thyroid or heart
- Drinking or taking too much caffeine

Symptoms of Anxiety

If you notice three or more of these symptoms, this could be a sign that you or your loved one is experiencing anxiety.

- Worrying that takes a long time to go away
- Trouble concentrating or mind going blank
- Unable to sleep or stay asleep
- Feeling very tired or restless
- Feeling irritable

If you or your loved one starts to feel anxious or your anxiety is increasing, talk to your hospice nurse or physician about your options.

These are often signs that your anxiety is worsening:

- Trouble coping or loss of hope
- Increasing diarrhea, nausea, or urination
- Not wanting to spend time with family or friends
- Increasing need for alcohol, nicotine, or other substances
- Feeling lightheaded or dizzy
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Misusing medicines
- Sweating

There are many ways to help prevent and alleviate anxiety.

Non-Medical Treatments

- Keeping the room at or below room temperature
- Opening a window if the outside temperature permits
- Position a fan blowing cool air
- Quiet or relaxing environment
- Speak with hospice chaplain and/or social worker
- Use a humidifier in the room
- Provide reassurance
- Massage therapy or aromatherapy
- Meditation
- Relaxing music

Medicines to Treat Anxiety

Anxiety is often treated with medicine. These medicines are not available over-the-counter and are only available with a prescription written by your doctor.

Here is a list of commonly used medicines for treating anxiety:

- *Buspirone (BuSpar®)*
- *Lorazepam (Ativan®)*
- *Alprazolam (Xanax®)*
- *Hydroxyzine (Atarax®)*
- *Clonazepam (Klonopin®)*
- *Trazodone (Desyrel®)*
- *Diazepam (Valium®)*

Some anxiety medicines need to be taken daily to work the best. Other anxiety medicines work very quickly and can be given as needed. The medicines that work very quickly can be given for worsening anxiety. Be sure your hospice nurse or doctor shows you how to correctly take or give your medicines if anxiety increases suddenly.

Side Effects of Anxiety Medicines

These medicines can decrease anxiety but can also have side effects. Side effects are unwanted or undesired changes that can happen in your body.

Some common side effects include:

- Feeling sleepy or drowsy
- Feeling very weak
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Physical dependence

Some serious side effects include:

- Shaking
- Muscle aches or cramps
- Behavior changes that worsen after taking the medicines
- Stomach cramps or upset stomach

Concerns About Anxiety

Your hospice team is here to care for you during this time. If you have any concerns about anxiety talk to your hospice nurse or doctor. Anxiety that goes untreated can affect your quality of life.

References

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3. Fairman N, Hirst JM, Irwin SA. Clinical manual of palliative care psychiatry. 1st ed. Arlington: American Psychiatric Association; 2016.
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5. Spencer R, et al. Anxiety disorders in advanced cancer patients: Correlates and predictors of end-of-life outcomes. Cancer. 2010; 116(7):1810-1819.