



## Anxiety

Anxiety is when you feel worried, afraid or threatened. It is normal for people with HIV and AIDS to feel nervous about their health, their treatment, or their future.

Some kinds of anxiety focus on one event. Other kinds last for a very long time. It may be a sense that something is wrong. Anxiety can happen after a major shock or painful event. It can make you afraid to do normal things in life. A person with severe anxiety may have panic attacks. Panic attacks can be very painful and feel like a heart attack.

## Signs

The signs of anxiety differ from person to person. Signs of anxiety are a problem when they last for more than two weeks. The signs happen in your body and in the way you feel.

Some signs to look for include:

- Heart beat faster than normal
- Sore muscles
- Upset stomach or loose stool
- Flushes, sweats, chills or cold clammy hands
- Dizzy or light-headed
- Shortness of breath
- Skin rashes
- Tremors, twitches, or the shakes
- Pain in your chest

People who have other mental health problems, women, and people who abuse alcohol or drugs are all at greater risk for anxiety.

Other signs of anxiety have to do with how you feel. Some of these are:

- Hard to focus on things for very long
- Food doesn't sound good to you
- No pleasure in things you like to do
- Hard to sit still
- Easy to get upset or annoyed
- Little or no interest in sex
- Feel afraid, nervous or jumpy
- Sense that something bad will happen
- Hard to fall asleep or stay asleep
- Feel like there is a lump in your throat

## Causes

Anxiety is one way your body and mind deal with stress. You have to make some hard choices when you live with HIV. Some changes in your life may be tough to deal with. These can all cause anxiety. Other life issues can lead to more stress than you can handle.

- Life events. These can be treatment issues, money issues, the death of a friend or partner or family problems.
- Changes in your brain
- Some HIV meds
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Lack of vitamins B6 or B12

A healthy diet, daily exercise and a strong network of friends help prevent anxiety.

## Treatment

It is normal to feel a little anxious about stressful things in life. Anxiety should not be taken lightly. It can change the way you think and feel every day. Some treatments you can learn on your own. Your doctor may suggest other things to do.

- You can take deep breaths. You can use nice pictures in your mind to calm down and relax.
- A trained person can help talk through fears and worries with you. It is good if he or she has worked with people with HIV before.
- Tell your doctor what medicine and vitamins you take. Drugs that change your mood can mix badly and cause side-effects.
- Good sleep, regular exercise and time in the sun also help.

Anxiety shares symptoms with other illnesses. A doctor may ask about:

- Drug and alcohol use
- If people in your family have problems with anxiety or depression
- How much coffee, tea, or soda you drink
- Use of other medicine, vitamins or herbs
- Stress level

Do not use alcohol or street drugs to cope with anxiety. They make things worse.

### **For more information**

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call PHP Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

