



# How to Manage Anxiety

## This guide will help you understand:

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This guide is written for people living with kidney disease and those who help care for them. It does not replace advice from your healthcare team (for example, your nephrologist, nurses, social worker, dietitian, pharmacist, and family doctor).

## What is Anxiety?

**Anxiety is feelings of worry, distress, fear, or being nervous.**

- It can come and go – some days may be free of anxiety and other days filled with it
- Low level anxiety may make you:
  - Feel restless, worried, and unable to relax
  - Have tense muscles
  - Have trouble sleeping
  - Have moodiness and stress
- High level anxiety may cause strong anxiety or panic attacks that come on quickly and have physical symptoms that can be concerning, such as racing heart, sweating, and chest pain



**Let your healthcare team know if you have anxiety that stops you from doing everyday activities, sleeping, or enjoying life.**

## What Causes Anxiety?

**Some anxiety is common for people living with kidney disease because they are often faced with new and challenging concerns about their health.**

Many things related to kidney disease can contribute to anxiety. This includes:

- Changes in your health, treatment, or waiting for test results
- Fear of medical procedures, including needles
- Fear of suffering or dying
- Having new symptoms or side-effects that scare you
- Worrying about your family and loved ones
- Feeling like you have no control over your life
- The impact of kidney disease on work, diet, finances, and social activities

## What Can I Do To Help Manage My Anxiety?

### Find Support

**Support from family, friends, and your community can comfort you and help you feel less scared and alone.**



- Places to find support:
  - Talk to someone you trust and who is a good listener (for example, a friend or family member)
  - Talk to your family doctor or a member of your healthcare team
  - Talk to someone at a place of worship – spiritual or religious advice may help you feel better
  - Join a kidney disease support program to share stories with other people. Many hospitals and The Kidney Foundation of Canada offer support programs where you can get in touch with others who can share their experiences.
  - Seek counselling by talking to a social worker either at your renal program or in your community

- Learn more about kidney disease
  - People who learn about kidney disease and treatment options often feel more in control and feel less anxiety
  - Be ready for your appointments with a list of questions and bring a support person if you can. It can be helpful to take notes during your visit to remember the things that are important to you.

### Identify Your Fears

- Sometimes it is uncertainty or the unknown that is worrisome
- Understanding what scares you is important and may help reduce your anxiety

### Focus on Things That Make You Feel Better

- Focus on:
  - The positive parts of your life that you are grateful for
  - Things that you can control
- Spend time with people who make you laugh
- Do activities that you enjoy and that help you relax (such as music, nature, and art)



### Be safe!

- ✓ If you believe your anxiety may be leading you to avoid treatments or tests, let your healthcare team know

## Exercise and Take Care of Your Body

**Exercise or being active is a good way to lower your anxiety and improve your mood.**

- Choose an activity that you are comfortable with and is right for your health and fitness level
- Start slowly with light exercise, such as walking, swimming, or yoga
  - There are also many exercises that can be done while seated
- Go at your own pace – slowly increase the amount and difficulty of your activities. If you are already active, talk to your healthcare team about your activities and make a plan to keep doing them

### Exercise may also:

- Give you more energy
- Help you manage pain
- Improve your appetite
- Help you sleep better
- Build stronger muscles
- Improve your mood



### Be safe!

- ✓ Stop and rest if you feel sore, stiff or out of breath
- ✓ Always talk to your healthcare team about how to exercise safely

## Improve Your Sleep

**Getting good sleep can give you more energy and help you feel better emotionally.**

Go to [www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms](http://www.ontariorenalnetwork.ca/symptoms) and read the Ontario Renal Network's Fatigue Symptom Self-Management Guide for more tips that may help you improve your sleep.

## Avoid Alcohol and Quit Smoking

**Alcohol and the nicotine in cigarettes can make people have more anxiety – even small amounts can affect the way you feel.**

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about making a plan to reduce or stop drinking and/or smoking that is right for you
- Quitting can be hard. Here are some resources to help you:
  - **Smokers Helpline, Canadian Cancer Society**  
[www.smokershelpline.ca](http://www.smokershelpline.ca)
  - **ConnexOntario – Addiction, Mental Health, and Problem Gambling Treatment Services**  
[www.connexontario.ca](http://www.connexontario.ca) or 1-866-531-2600

## Make Lists of Calming, Enjoyable and Useful Activities

- When you feel anxious, get your list of activities and choose one to try. Include:
  - Activities you enjoy, such as going for a walk, watching your favourite TV shows, or taking a bath or shower
  - Things you can do during dialysis treatments, such as listening to music, reading, and knitting
- Put the chores you are able to do into a daily or weekly schedule – getting them done will help you feel in control

**Get Counselling to Help You Cope**

With professional counselling you can learn different ways of thinking and behaving to help you cope with anxiety.

- Counselling can also be called psychotherapy

**Your healthcare team can help you connect with a:**

- Social Worker
- Psychiatrist
- Psychologist
- Psychotherapist



**When Should I Talk To My Healthcare Team?**

Your healthcare team wants to know about the anxiety you are feeling. Your concerns and questions are important and can be safely shared with your healthcare team. If the anxiety you are feeling does not get better, medication may help to control it. You can discuss medication options with your healthcare team.



**Where Can I Get More Information?**

**Mental Health Websites:**

- Canadian Mental Health Association  
[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health  
[www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca)

**Mood disorders:**

- Mood Disorders Association of Canada  
[www.mooddorders.ca](http://www.mooddorders.ca)

**Sleep:**

- Canadian Sleep Society  
[www.css-scs.ca/resources/brochures](http://www.css-scs.ca/resources/brochures)
- National Sleep Foundation  
[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

**Mindfulness:**

- Mindful Awareness Stabilization Training (MAST) program  
[www.stmichaelshospital.com/programs/mentalhealth/mast.php](http://www.stmichaelshospital.com/programs/mentalhealth/mast.php)

**Notes**

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The Ontario Renal Network gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

This document is designed to provide people living with kidney disease with information about anxiety. It is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a qualified health professional, nor is it intended to provide a comprehensive list of treatment options. As treatment options and standards are constantly evolving, we do not guarantee that the information in this document is current. Always ask your healthcare team if you have questions or concerns.

**Need this information in an accessible format?**

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