

# Family Education Sheet

## Managing anxiety: a guide for young adults and families with complex medical needs



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This sheet gives you information about what anxiety is and how it can be a part of caring for a child with complex medical needs.

### Key points

- Anxiety is a condition that can make us feel worried, stressed and/or frightened.
- There are ways to cut down on your anxiety. You don't have to suffer and wait for it to go away on its own.
- You can find medical help for your anxiety. Or you can start by simply talking about your concerns with someone you trust.

### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling we all experience when things seem uncertain or scary. It's normal to feel anxious about the future if you're living with a complex medical condition. Worrying about your medical condition or what might happen next is perfectly natural.

Remember: Feeling anxious doesn't mean you're weak — it's just your body's way of reacting to stress or worry.

Some reasons you might feel anxious include:

- **Not knowing what to expect:** You can feel out of control when you don't have all the answers about your condition or treatment.
- **Worrying about your health:** You might fear that your illness could get worse.
- **Concerns about treatment:** The treatments you need can sometimes feel overwhelming. It's OK to be worried about how they'll affect you.
- **Changing relationships:** Your relationships with others can change when your health changes. This can lead to feeling isolated or feeling like a burden.

Anxiety is something many people face. It's important to recognize it so that you can take steps to manage it. Talking to your healthcare team, family or friends about how you feel can be a big help.

### What can I do about my anxiety?

Here are some simple ways to help manage anxiety, especially when dealing with complex medical needs:

- **Learn what you can:** Anxiety grows when we feel unsure. The more you understand about your illness, the more you can feel in control. Ask your doctors and nurses for information. But remember that it's OK not to know everything at once. Sometimes, too much information can make you feel even more anxious.

- **Bring a friend or family member to appointments:** Having someone with you at your doctor's visits can make things easier. They can help take notes, ask questions and support you emotionally during tough discussions.
- **Relax and breathe:** Anxiety can make your body feel tense. Try things like deep breathing, stretching or listening to calming music to help ease those physical feelings. There are lots of online classes for mindfulness and relaxation that are made just for people with health challenges.
- **Talk to your healthcare team:** Don't be afraid to tell your doctors or nurses if you're feeling anxious. Sharing what's on your mind can help them understand and give you tips on how to feel better. They may connect you with a counselor or other support to help manage your anxiety.

*Remember, managing anxiety takes time. Lean on your loved ones and don't hesitate to ask for help when you need it.*

### What should I ask my doctor or nurse about anxiety?

Your medical team can help with both your physical and emotional health. Here are some helpful questions you can ask:

- "I've been feeling worried. Is there someone I can talk to about it?"
- "Can my condition or treatment be making me feel anxious?"
- "Could the medicines I'm taking be affecting my anxiety?"
- "Do you think medication could help with my anxiety?"
- "How long will it take before I start feeling better?"
- "Will my anxiety come back? Are there things I can do to prevent it?"
- "What can I do at home to help manage my anxiety?"
- "Are there any activities or changes I can try to reduce my anxiety during treatment?"
- "How can my family and friends help me with my anxiety?"




## Nurturing your mental health: exploring counseling and emotional support


Taking care of your mental health is just as important as your physical health. If you're feeling anxious, sad or stressed, it's a good idea to talk to a professional who can help, like a social worker, psychologist or counselor. They can work with your medical team to support you and your family with emotions and concerns that might come up.

Here are some resources that can help:

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** offers resources and support for people going through mental health challenges

 Website: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

- **National Suicide Prevention Hotline (U.S.):** provides support for anyone in crisis.

 Phone: 988 or (800) 273-8255

Your healthcare team can help you connect with these resources or suggest other ones that might work for you. Whether it's talking to someone, joining a support group or finding therapy, it's OK to ask for help when you need it. You don't have to go through this alone.

*Remember, taking care of your mental health is an important part of your journey. It's OK to take things 1 step at a time and reach out when you need support.*