



THE EAP CONNECTION

Navigating the Positives and Negatives of Anxiety

Anxiety is difficult to navigate because it can be there for good reasons—to warn you of danger and help you escape, protect yourself, or withdraw to conserve energy. It can be a positive force, helping you to act when needed. Occasional feelings of anxiety, especially during uncertain, unexpected, and challenging times, are a normal part of life.

However, when anxious feelings interfere with daily activities and become intense, unwarranted, and difficult to control, it can be a cause for concern. Unmanaged anxiety can lead to avoidance of situations and places, prevent you from functioning well, and negatively impact your life.

Anxiety can look like:

- Feeling nervous, restless, or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic, or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

If you notice these symptoms in yourself, there are many effective strategies you can use to cope.

Practice good self-care. The healthy habits you build into your life now are the tools you can depend on during times of higher-than-usual stress and anxiety. Exercising, eating healthy, drinking plenty of water, and getting adequate sleep can support you through difficult points and keep you feeling more balanced.

Stop and breathe. When anxiety flares, take a time-out. Anxiety is typically experienced as worrying about a future or past event. The next time your anxiety tries to take you out of the present, regain control by taking a few deep breaths. Taking a moment to stop and breathe can help restore a sense of calm and bring you back to the present moment.

Determine what you can control. Life is unpredictable, and anxiety often stems from fear about things that have not happened and may never happen. You can't control the future, but you can decide how you are going to deal with the unknown. You can turn your anxiety into a source of strength by letting go of fear and changing your attitude. What are you grateful for? What is something right now that you can do to feel better? By focusing on what you can control or change, you can shift from your anxious state into one of empowerment.

Learn your anxiety triggers to better cope with them. Are there situations or environments that tend to increase your anxiety? Identifying your triggers can help you build strategies to handle anxious feelings when they happen. Sometimes you may need to temporarily distract or redirect yourself if you are not in a place to address anxiety. In those moments, you could reach out to others for support, do projects around your home, take on small tasks at work, or engage in an enjoyable activity or hobby. Writing your worries down and coming back to them later can also be beneficial.

Anxiety is the top reason why clients use their company-sponsored Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through ERC. If you find it challenging to manage your anxiety symptoms, consider reaching out to your EAP for support. Call 1-800-222-8590.