

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

To learn more about how to help people with anxiety and other mental disorders, take Mental Health First Aid, a course that was developed in Australia and now available in Canada*. For information on courses in your community, contact Mental Health First Aid Canada at mhfacanada@amhb.ab.ca.

Learn more about anxiety, depression and stress by visiting online at:

www.amhb.ab.ca

www.cmha.ca

www.healthlinkalberta.ca

www.informalberta.ca

www.anxietycanada.ca

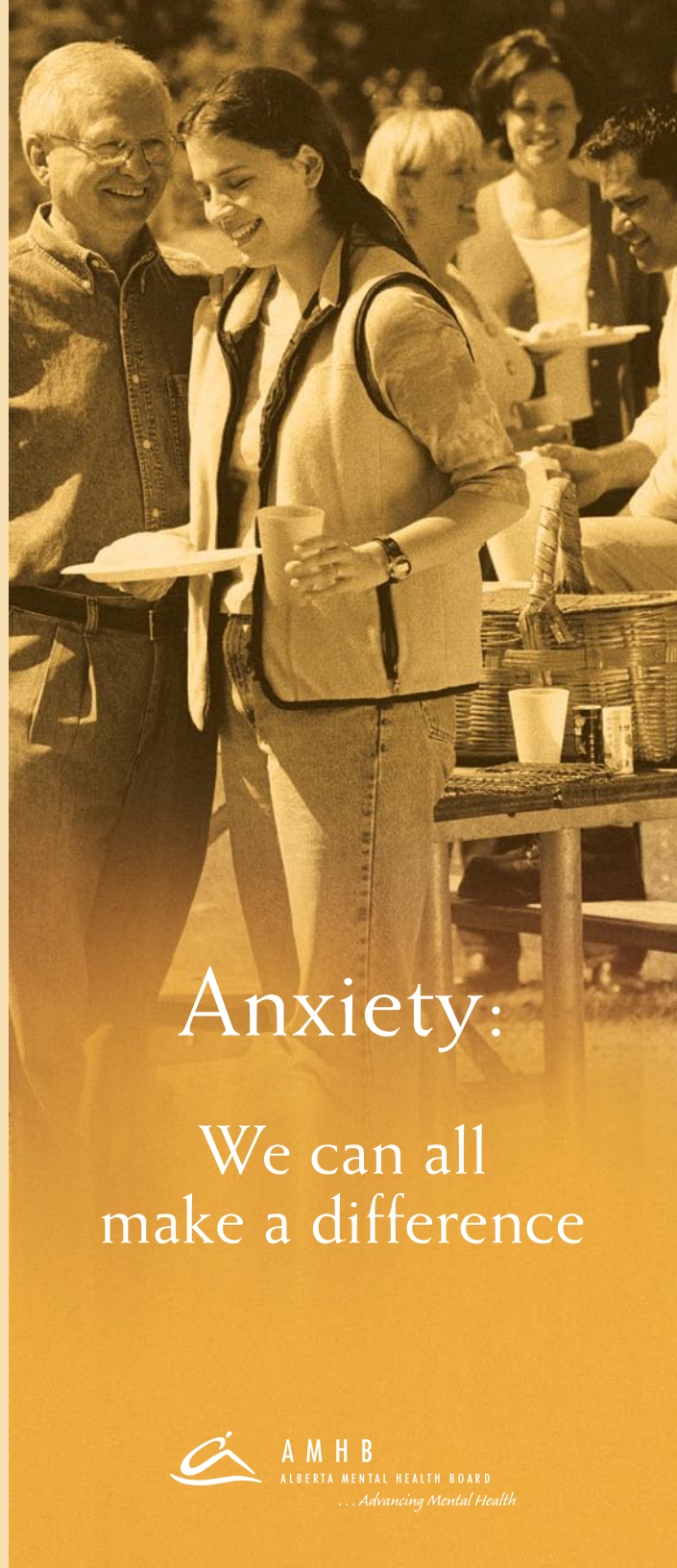
www.crufad.com

www.suicideinfo.ca

www.beyondblue.org.au

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

*Material for this brochure was adapted from Mental Health First Aid Canada.



Anxiety:

We can all make a difference



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What is Anxiety?

Although anxiety is the most common mental disorder in Canada, most people do not seek available treatment.

Everyone experiences an occasional bout of anxiety; however, it becomes problematic when it is too intense, lasts a long time or interferes with day-to-day activities. For example, extreme worry about things that are not likely to happen (such as getting into a car accident or being stuck in an elevator) can put strain on relationships, hinder work performance and cause a person to avoid certain situations.

WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

With the exception of traumatic events, it is difficult to pinpoint specific causes of anxiety. However, heredity, stress or illness can trigger the disorder.

HOW CAN I SPOT SOMEONE WITH ANXIETY?

It is important to understand the different types of anxiety disorders:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)** is the most common. It is overwhelming worry and fear about things that might go wrong even when there are no signs of trouble.
- **Panic attacks** are brief moments of intense fear, and its physical reactions include shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, shakiness, sweating, fear of losing control and wanting to run away. Panic attacks can feel like a heart attack even though they are not life threatening. However, it is important to be checked out at an emergency department immediately following one to ensure that it is not a medical problem.
- **Phobias** are irrational and extreme fears related to specific situations, people or things. Often the fear is about being harmed, losing control, having a panic attack or being embarrassed. A person with a phobia will go to extreme lengths to avoid situations that cause anxiety. For example, they might be unable to go outside of their home alone.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorders** are unwanted, repetitive, intrusive thoughts and/or repetitive behaviours that cause serious distress, consume a lot of time or interfere with daily routines.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorders** are an intense and lasting reaction to serious, life threatening events that have occurred in the past such as violence, accidents or natural disasters.

The following are signs and symptoms of anxiety:

- **Physical** signs include rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, dizziness, sweating, headaches, neck aches, dry mouth, nausea, diarrhea, restlessness and tremors or shakiness.
- **Psychological** signs include excessive fear or worry, racing thoughts, difficulty concentrating, memory loss, irritability, sleep disturbance and vivid dreams.
- **Behavioural** signs include avoidance, distress in social situations, repetitive or unwelcome thoughts and behaviours.

HOW CAN I HELP SOMEONE WITH ANXIETY?

The good news is anxiety can be treated and people do get better. Here are some ways you can help someone with anxiety:

Watch for signs. A person with anxiety may experience some or all of the symptoms described above. They may seem overly worried, jumpy, or irritable; experience panic attacks; avoid specific situations; worry excessively about their health or potential disasters; or may not tackle responsibilities as they normally do.

Listen and reassure. Listen with your heart, and try not to judge. Ask them if they are feeling uptight. Tell them you think they might be experiencing anxiety but also reassure them that it is a common disorder and people can get help and recover.

Help them get help. Encourage them to see a family doctor, a psychologist, or a qualified mental health therapist. Counselling can help change thoughts, behaviours and feelings to reduce anxiety. Medication may also be effective. Help the person get in touch with a professional.

Anxiety left untreated can lead to depression or suicide. If you are concerned a person may be at risk, ask them if they are thinking of suicide. One of the ways to get immediate help is by calling a crisis line in the community.

There is help and information available 24/7 at the Mental Health Help Line (1-877-303-2642) or HealthLink Alberta (1-866-408-5465).