

ANXIETY



What's wrong with me?

- I worry about what will happen to me and my family. Will any of us get sick from COVID-19?
- I'm irritable and get angry easily
- My mind goes fast with worries and I have unexplained feelings in my body
- I can't concentrate or focus enough to get things done
- My mouth feels very dry
- I have an upset stomach, cramps, or diarrhoea
- I sweat a lot
- I often can't sleep well
- I feel dizzy or lightheaded
- My muscles are tense

What is it?

Anxiety is worrying that something bad will happen or that something that matters will go wrong or not happen as you want it to

- Some people also describe feeling anxious when they have a strong desire or concern to do something or see something happening.
- A low level of anxiety is normal, we need it to motivate ourselves.
- When anxiety is too high it gets in our way.
- It feels like intense worry or fear and can cause a person to panic.
- It's more than usual worries. Serious anxiety can get in the way of everyday functioning.
- Anxiety can lead to a lack of self-confidence.
- It can interfere with relationships

What causes it?

- Stress, more than what a person feels they can handle (work, home, financial, relationships, serious illness)
- Low self confidence
- Very difficult life circumstances or serious losses
- Trauma (including any kind of abuse)
- Depression – anxiety often goes hand in hand with depression or other mental health problems
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Some prescription medication, including some ARVs
- Some medical conditions
- Worries about HIV and or COVID can increase anxiety

- » I know there isn't really anything bad that's going to happen so why can't I just make these thoughts and feelings go away?
- » Anxiety is a real condition. Your brain is wired to protect you from a threat or danger because of things you've experienced, but it is overworking and can be reacting in a way that is out of proportion with your current circumstances. You can learn to retrain it.

What can I do about it?

- Anxiety is treatable
- Talk with someone you trust, if possible a counsellor, about how you're feeling and any current stress you're experiencing
- If you have a lot of physical symptoms talk with your clinic nurse or doctor to be sure there's not a medical condition or problem from medication, including your ARVs
- Avoid using alcohol and drugs that are not prescribed for you to deal with stress. They can make anxiety worse, even if they initially feel like they help settle feelings down.
- Medication may be helpful if your anxiety is severe, especially short term while you learn other ways to address anxiety.
- Techniques to settle your body down can be very helpful:
 - Sit comfortably and focus on your breathing. Slow it down, breath out more slowly than you breath in. Slowly count to 4 as you breathe in and 6 as you breathe out.
 - Focus on the present, where you are exactly- notice 3 things you see around you; 3 things you can feel with your hand; 3 noises you hear around you; what you feel yourself sitting or standing on. Stamp your feet. As you pay attention to this, notice if any of the feelings in your body change.
 - Go for a walk, count your steps as you walk.
 - Get involved in an activity that you find interesting and that you think matters.

