

Treating anxiety and stress disorders with therapy

February 23, 2026

Insight-oriented psychotherapy

This form of traditional talk therapy delves into how life events, desires, and past and current relationships affect your feelings, lead to discomfort, and contribute to your anxiety. During treatment, you and your therapist will discover the unconscious reasons behind your anxiety. Together, you'll explore how unresolved conflicts from your past may contribute to your present distress. The goal is to increase your self-awareness, as well as your acceptance of certain feelings or thoughts that may otherwise create discomfort or internal conflict.

For more information on therapy or other treatments for anxiety, check out [Coping with Anxiety and Stress Disorders](#), a Special Health Report from Harvard Medical School.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

CBT, the leading form of psychotherapy for anxiety, aims to correct ingrained patterns of negative thoughts and behaviors. As the name suggests, the treatment has two parts. Cognitive therapy helps people change patterns of thinking that prevent them from overcoming their fears. Behavioral therapy works to change their reactions in situations that trigger anxiety. People with social anxiety disorder, for example, may assume that others will inevitably regard what they say as stupid. This is negative thinking. As a result, these people may avoid being with or talking to others. This is an example of negative behavior. The goal of CBT is to break this chain of thoughts and reactions.