

Anxiety Relief Checklist for Older Adults

A step-by-step list you can work through on your own to recognize anxiety, rule out physical causes, prepare for your doctor, and build calm into your day.

How to use this checklist

Anxiety affects an estimated 10 to 20 percent of older adults, and it is often mistaken for depression, memory trouble, or "just part of getting older." It is none of those things, and it responds well to treatment at any age. Work down this list at your own pace. Check off what you have done. Leave the rest for another day.

1. Notice what you have been feeling

Check any sign you have noticed in yourself over the past few weeks. There are no wrong answers here — you are only gathering information.

In how you feel and act:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I worry most days, even with no clear reason | ☐ I startle easily at noises |
| ☐ I feel irritable or short-tempered | ☐ I ask people for reassurance again and again |
| ☐ I feel restless, or I pace | ☐ Small decisions feel hard to make |
| ☐ I have been turning down invitations | ☐ I dread things that never used to bother me |

In your body:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Headaches, back pain, or tight muscles | ☐ Shortness of breath |
| ☐ Tired even after a full night in bed | ☐ Sweating, or feeling hot and cold |
| ☐ Trouble holding my concentration | ☐ Upset stomach, nausea, or more trips to the bathroom |
| ☐ Racing or pounding heartbeat | ☐ Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep |

- ☐ **I have written down how many weeks this has been going on.** If it has been more than a few weeks, that is your signal to talk to a doctor.

2. Rule out a physical cause first

Anxious feelings in later life very often start with something physical. Before you assume it is "all in your head," rule these out.

- ☐ I have scheduled a full check-up with my primary doctor.
- ☐ I have made a complete list of every medication I take — prescriptions, over-the-counter pills, vitamins, and supplements.
- ☐ I have noted which medications are new or changed in the last few months.
- ☐ I have asked whether any of them can cause jitteriness or a racing heart — sleep aids, blood pressure medicines, and breathing medicines are common culprits.
- ☐ I have asked about my thyroid, blood sugar, and heart, since these can all produce anxious symptoms.
- ☐ I have told my doctor how much caffeine I drink each day, including tea and soda.
- ☐ I have mentioned any pain I live with — ongoing pain and worry feed each other.

3. Prepare for the conversation with your doctor

Appointments are short. Walking in prepared is the single best way to be taken seriously.

- ☐ I have written my three biggest concerns at the top of a page and I will read them out loud first.
- ☐ I have described my symptoms in plain words — "my chest gets tight and I can't settle" — instead of waiting to be asked.
- ☐ I have said out loud how long this has been going on.
- ☐ I have asked: "Could this be anxiety?" — many older adults are never asked directly.
- ☐ I have asked what talk therapy would look like, and whether Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is available near me.

- ☐ I have asked whether medicine is appropriate, and what the trade-offs are at my age.
- ☐ I have asked whether I should see someone who specializes in older adults.
- ☐ I have brought someone with me, or asked to record the visit, so I do not have to remember everything.
- ☐ I have booked the follow-up appointment before leaving the office.

4. Steady your day

A predictable day gives anxiety less room to work. Pick one or two of these to start.

- ☐ I get up and go to bed at roughly the same time every day.
- ☐ I have one anchor in the morning and one in the afternoon — a walk, a call, a program, a chore.
- ☐ I have set aside a specific 15 minutes as my "worry time," so worry is not allowed to run all day.
- ☐ I have made one part of my home quiet and uncluttered, with soft light and no television noise.
- ☐ I have cut back on caffeine after noon.
- ☐ I keep a notepad by the bed so a 3 a.m. thought can be written down and set aside.
- ☐ I have limited how much news I watch in a day.

5. Build your calm-down toolkit

Try each one at least twice before you decide whether it works for you.

- ☐ Slow breathing — breathe in slowly, breathe out even more slowly, ten times.
- ☐ Progressive muscle relaxation — tighten and release one part of the body at a time, feet to face.
- ☐ A short mindfulness or meditation recording.
- ☐ Writing in a journal for a few minutes when the worry starts.
- ☐ Calming music, a familiar hymn, or nature sounds.

- ☐ Time with a pet, or a visit with someone else's.
- ☐ Something with my hands — painting, drawing, knitting, woodworking, cards.
- ☐ Gentle movement — walking, swimming, chair yoga, or stretching.
- ☐ More fruit and vegetables, less sugar and caffeine.
- ☐ A bedtime routine, with screens off well before I lie down.

6. Stay connected

Isolation makes anxiety louder. Connection is not a luxury — it is treatment.

- ☐ I have named one person I can call on a hard day, and I have told them so.
- ☐ I have accepted one invitation this month instead of declining it.
- ☐ I have found one group that meets regularly — faith community, senior center, library, class, or club.
- ☐ I have asked about a phone-visitor or friendly-caller program through my local senior center.
- ☐ I have told at least one family member what I have been going through.
- ☐ I have looked into whether an anxiety or caregiver support group meets near me or online.

7. Protect what independence you can

- ☐ I have listed the things I can still do for myself, in writing.
- ☐ I have identified one task I gave up that I could take back with a small adjustment.
- ☐ When help is offered, I say what kind of help I actually want.
- ☐ I have made a plan for a change I know is coming — a move, a surgery, giving up night driving — instead of waiting for it.

8. Choose your next three steps

A checklist only helps if something happens next. Write down three things from the pages above that you will actually do, and when.

What I will do	By when	Done

Notes and questions I want to remember

Get help right away if any of these are true

Call your doctor now, or go to an emergency room, if you have chest pain you cannot explain, if panic is keeping you from eating or sleeping, if you have stopped leaving the house entirely, or if you feel like you do not want to be here anymore. In the U.S. you can call or text **988** at any hour to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, or call the Institute on Aging Friendship Line at **1-800-971-0016**, a 24-hour line for adults 60 and older.

Companion piece: the *Anxiety Relief Workbook for Older Adults* goes deeper — symptom tracking, medication review, scenario practice, and a 30-day plan.

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