



PediPRN

Bradley Hospital

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Addressing Physical Symptoms of Anxiety (Teens)

Intervention Script:

Anxiety is the body's response to stress. It makes sense that you would be experiencing increased stress with all the current changes and concerns related to COVID-19.

Our body has an automatic response system designed to protect us from threats or danger. In times of uncertainty and change, we often experience anxiety that triggers our body's automatic response which causes chemicals to be released in your body that tell your heart to beat faster requiring your breathing rate to increase. These changes lead to your body feeling uncomfortable, dizzy, sweaty, upset stomach and headaches, etc.

If we take control of our breathing when we become anxious, we can decrease the uncomfortable feelings in our body and restore our body's natural state of balance. This is why we recommend responding to physical symptoms of anxiety in one of two ways:

1. **Exercise:** Increasing our physical activity creates balance by matching your body's movements to the increased heart and breathing rate when anxious. (Exercise can be walking, riding bike, shooting hoops or indoor activities like sit-ups, jumping jacks, running in place, etc).
2. **Deep breathing/relaxation:** Controlling your breathing creates balance by decreasing your breathing (and therefore your heart rate) to your body's normal state.

Deep breathing requires breathing in through your nose slowly, filling your belly with air like it's a balloon, and slowly exhaling through your mouth.

One easy strategy to get started with this is called Figure 8 Breathing.

Imagine drawing a figure 8 on your skin (arm, leg, etc) with your index finger. I'm going to use this drawing to show you what to do. Start in the center. As you're drawing the first half of the figure 8, breathe in through your nose, into your belly for three seconds. When you get to the middle, hold your finger still for one second. Then, for the second half of the figure 8, breathe out through your mouth slowly for three seconds. When you get to the middle, hold for one again. (Repeat three or four times).

I would recommend practicing this when you notice your body feeling anxious.

Additional resources to recommend: Apps: search for "calm" (<https://www.calm.com/>) or "the breathing app" (<https://eddiestern.com/the-breathing-app/>) in apple app/google play app store. Website: <https://students.dartmouth.edu/wellness-center/wellness-mindfulness/relaxation-downloads> (enter "Dartmouth relaxation" in internet search engine)

Smartphrase:

Patient reporting increased anxiety related to current COVID-19 pandemic during telehealth visit. Current symptoms include: ***

Anxiety related interventions:

Reminded patient and family that anxiety is common, especially in response to acute stressors such as the current pandemic, and that positive health behaviors (e.g., getting enough sleep, eating nutrient rich foods, physical activity, etc) and distraction are strategies that can help with symptoms.

Education was provided regarding physiological response to stress and anxiety and effective strategies to manage these symptoms including exercise and deep breathing/relaxation. Reviewed Figure 8 breathing strategy in detail, provided electronic resources for additional guidance re deep breathing and relaxation (calm.com, the breathing app, and Dartmouth college wellness center relaxation page)

Reviewed plan to consider additional treatment options, should symptoms persist and/or have a significant impact on patient's functioning.

Total time of telephone contact: ***minutes