

Anxiety

KEY POINTS

- ➔ Anxiety is a common experience for both patients and family/caregivers
- ➔ Up to 25% of individuals with cancer and 50% of those with congestive heart disease or COPD experience significant anxiety
- ➔ Anxiety is influenced by type, stage, and site of disease, coping mechanisms, and access to social and emotional support
- ➔ Management of physical symptoms is very important, since unrelieved symptoms such as pain or dyspnoea may create or worsen anxiety
- ➔ Psychological, social, and spiritual distress are all important contributing factors to anxiety
- ➔ Anxiety is best addressed by combining both pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions

ASSESSMENT

- ➔ Interdisciplinary assessment to identify stressors
 - ➔ Stressors are stimuli that disturb a person's normal psychological balance
 - ➔ Stressors may be physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or existential
 - ➔ In advanced illness, the knowledge that death is imminent, inability to work, perception of becoming a burden, and loss of physical abilities are often stressors
- ➔ Assess the characteristics, severity, and duration of the anxiety
- ➔ Explore the individual's previous experiences of anxiety
- ➔ Observe and explore the reactions of family members to the anxiety and their concerns
- ➔ Continue ongoing assessments of the individual's response to anxiety treatment

- ➔ Consider whether any medications are causing increased anxiety (e.g. corticosteroids, psychostimulants, anti-dopaminergics, and some antidepressants)
- ➔ Discontinuation of alcohol, opioids, benzodiazepines, nicotine, clonidine, antidepressants, and corticosteroids can also worsen anxiety

MANAGEMENT

- ➔ Anxiety can vary in duration and intensity
- ➔ Both pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions may be helpful
- ➔ Adverse drug effects: corticosteroids, psychostimulants, and some other medications

Non-Pharmacological

- ➔ Counselling support
- ➔ Therapeutic interventions: See Therapeutic Interventions section for more details
 - ➔ Relaxation techniques
 - ➔ Guided imagery
 - ➔ Breathing exercises
 - ➔ Meditation
 - ➔ Coping skills
 - ➔ Cognitive behavioural approaches
 - ➔ Music
 - ➔ Cultural activities and rituals

Pharmacological

- ➔ A short course of low dose benzodiazepines (e.g. **lorazepam**, **clonazepam**, **diazepam**) may be helpful
- ➔ Treatment with antidepressants (SSRIs or SNRIs) are helpful in treating anxiety in some individuals, particularly for patients who are expected to live for longer (i.e. not at end of life)

- **SSRIs: sertraline, citalopram, and escitalopram**
- **SNRIs: venlafaxine, duloxetine**
- **Mirtazepine**