

Anxiety disorders

7 A's model



Be AWARE that people with diabetes may experience elevated anxiety symptoms

- An anxiety disorder is a diagnosable mental condition characterised by frequent, intense and excessive anxiety symptoms (for minimum six months).
- Look for signs: frequent, intense, and excessive nervousness or worry, irritability, restlessness, trembling, dizziness, muscle tension, sleep disturbance, or panic attacks.

ASK about elevated anxiety symptoms

- When to ask:
 - when the person reports symptoms or when you have noted signs (see **AWARE**)
 - in periods of significant diabetes-related challenge or adjustment (e.g. following diagnosis of diabetes or complications, hospitalisation, or severe hypoglycaemia with loss of consciousness)
 - during or after stressful life events
 - if the individual has a history of anxiety disorder(s) or other mental health problems
 - in line with clinical practice guidelines.
- Use open-ended questions or the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Two (GAD-2):
 - ‘Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling nervous, anxious or on edge?’
 - ‘Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by not being able to stop or control worrying?’
 - Response options are scored: ‘Not at all’ (0), ‘Several days’ (1), ‘More than half the days’ (2), ‘Nearly every day’ (3). Sum the responses to form a total score.
- If the GAD-2 total score is:
 - 3 or more – check whether the person has a current diagnosis of, or is currently receiving treatment for, an anxiety disorder. If neither, then further assessment is warranted (see **ASSESS**)
 - less than 3 but you suspect a problem – consider whether the person may be experiencing diabetes distress, depression, or another psychological problem.

ASSESS for elevated anxiety symptoms using a validated questionnaire

- When to assess:
 - in line with clinical practice guidelines
 - if **AWARE** or **ASK** indicates elevated anxiety symptoms.
- Use a brief, validated questionnaire, such as the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Seven (GAD-7).
- GAD-7 total score 10 or more – moderate-to-severe anxiety symptoms are indicated:
 - enquire about any past history of anxiety disorder(s) and other mental health problems
 - consider the possibility of co-existing conditions (e.g. depression)
 - explore physiological, psychological, and behavioural causes for the elevated anxiety symptoms (including diabetes-related factors)
 - continue to **ADVISE**.
- GAD-7 total score less than 10 – elevated anxiety symptoms are not indicated. Consider another psychological problem (e.g. diabetes distress, diabetes-specific fears, depression).

NB: A clinical interview must be conducted (e.g. by a GP or mental health professional) to diagnose an anxiety disorder – see **ASSIGN**.

NB: If you identify a person as having elevated anxiety symptoms, consider whether a suicide risk assessment is needed.

ADVISE about elevated anxiety symptoms

- Explain that their questionnaire responses indicate they are experiencing elevated anxiety symptoms; they may have an anxiety disorder, which will need to be confirmed with a clinical interview.
- Describe what an anxiety disorder is, and how it might impact on their life overall and their diabetes management.
- Advise that anxiety disorders are common, treatable, and can be managed effectively.
- Advise that treating the anxiety disorder can help to improve their life overall and their diabetes management.
- Make a joint plan about the 'next steps' (e.g. what needs to be achieved and who can help).

ASSIST with developing an achievable action plan

- If an anxiety disorder has been confirmed by clinical interview, assist the person to:
 - make an informed choice about a suitable treatment for the anxiety disorder – discuss the pros and cons for each option
 - set measurable goals to reduce anxiety symptoms and adapt their diabetes management plan if needed
 - identify sources of advice and support
 - start the preferred treatment (e.g. write a Mental Health Treatment Plan, a referral to a specialist for psychological support, or a prescription for medication).

ASSIGN to another health professional

- If you do not feel comfortable or equipped to **ASSESS** or **ASSIST**, arrange a referral to a relevant health professional.
- Maintain ongoing communication with the health professional to whom you made the referral.

ARRANGE follow-up care

- Arrange a follow-up appointment to:
 - ask about the person's progress
 - assess the potential need for revising the action plan.
- Be prepared to offer more support (e.g. through telephone reviews or more/extended consultations) during this time.