



# overview

## Women's Health Overview

## Coping with Anxiety in These Uncertain Times

Have you ever felt a sense of dread or a pit in your stomach? Maybe you were worried about something bad happening, even though it was unlikely. Chances are what you were experiencing was anxiety. Anxiety is your brain's natural alarm system, which is designed to keep you safe from danger. It can be useful when you're crossing the street and a car doesn't look like it's going to stop – your fear is like rocket fuel to hurry you across the street to safety. Anxiety is a natural function necessary for our survival (think fight or flight). But what if you experience those same feelings when there is no clear threat, no car coming at you? And this happens day after day, interfering with your ability to fully live your life? In these situations, we may be dealing with an “alarm system” that needs some recalibration.

**Anxiety affects over 40 million adults in the U.S.**, making it the most common mental health concern. According to a recent survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, rates of anxiety

were three times higher during the pandemic than in the previous year. Additionally, nearly all racial/ethnic groups have experienced an increase in moderate to severe anxiety in the past year. Ongoing societal stressors such as racism, economic uncertainty and loneliness can worsen and prolong our anxiety, resulting in us feeling increasingly overwhelmed.

To manage anxiety, it can be helpful to know the different ways we experience it: physically, cognitively (our thoughts) and behaviorally. Physical symptoms can include a racing heart, muscle tension, nausea/vomiting, feeling dizzy, among many other sensations. Our thoughts may become pessimistic, like overestimating the likelihood of a worst-case scenario and underestimating our ability to cope. We may even have thoughts like “I’m going to have a heart attack!” These feelings and thoughts may influence our behaviors, such that we avoid anything that provokes anxiety, even important things we care about.

see Anxiety pg. 4

## Facts About Anxiety

It is normal and natural to experience occasional anxiety. If you experience anxiety that is persistent and seemingly uncontrollable, such that it interferes with daily living, then it may be an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are real, serious medical conditions and are the most common mental disorders in the U.S.

The term “anxiety disorder” refers to specific psychiatric disorders that involve extreme fear or worry, and includes generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder and panic attacks, agoraphobia, social anxiety disorder, specific phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Below are some facts about anxiety disorders:

- National prevalence data indicate that nearly 40 million people in the United States (18%) experience an anxiety disorder in any given year
- Anxiety disorders run in families and have a biological basis. They may develop due to genetics, brain chemistry, personality and life events
- Approximately 8% of children and teenagers experience an anxiety disorder with most people developing symptoms before the age of 21

Source: What is Anxiety and Depression? | Anxiety & Depression Association of America (adaa.org)



# From the Chairman

In this edition of our newsletter, we are discussing the importance of prenatal care. Without question the early evaluation of pregnant patients allows health care providers to identify potential risks, provide important education about diet, exercise and medication use, as well as outline things to avoid during pregnancy. This allows the creation of a plan of care for routine and complicated pregnancies that is designed to reduce risk, and ultimately improve the chances for a successful pregnancy outcome. While this visit is important, even more important are preconception visits.

For patients considering pregnancy, a preconception visit with a knowledgeable provider can offer even greater benefit to the patient and her infant. Optimizing physical condition and weight reduces the risks of diabetes, hypertension, growth restriction and preterm labor. A preconception visit is of even greater benefit in patients requiring medications for a host of medical problems. Your provider can make recommendations for changing medications to those that have greater safety during pregnancy. In those patients with diseases like diabetes, control of blood sugars at the time of conception is associated with a lower rate of pregnancy loss and a lower rate of fetal abnormalities. In fact, if blood sugars are normal for 60 to 90 days prior to conception the risk of miscarriage and fetal abnormalities is no different than in patients without diabetes. If you are thinking about pregnancy, please take a few minutes to discuss these issues with your provider. Once you become pregnant an early prenatal visit is extremely important.

**Carl V. Smith, MD, FACOG**  
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### Women's Health Overview

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# research news

## Reproductive Aging and Women's Health

To understand the aging process in women, scientists have to unravel two entangled and challenging health disparities. Why is a woman's lifespan longer than a man's lifespan? Why is the reproductive lifespan of women considerably shorter than men? Progress in understanding these important questions was initially hampered by the failure to include women into research study populations in order to understand the influence of sex on aging.

Aging research is seeing extraordinary growth, particularly in the areas of brain development and cognitive disorders like Alzheimer's disease. How and why women undergo a decline in reproductive function with age is understudied, especially given that aging of the reproductive system ultimately affects every woman. The reproductive system is the first major organ system to age in the female body. Reproductive aging is characterized by a noticeable decline in egg quantity and quality. This aging process is thought to begin in women when they reach their mid-thirties and continue until menopause. Female

reproductive aging has significant health consequences as it is a leading cause of infertility, miscarriages and birth defects. The end of fertility also results in a loss of endocrine function, initiating many negative health effects in women's bodies that impact bone, cognitive, cardiovascular and immune function.

Aging has a large societal impact as women globally are delaying childbearing. Increasing numbers of women of advanced reproductive age rely on assisted reproductive technologies (ART) to conceive. A goal of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) is to enable women and men to manage fertility and minimize the impact of women's and men's fertility conditions in support of lifelong reproductive health. Ongoing research supported by NICHD serves to characterize age-related changes in the reproductive system and their impact on reproductive outcomes, particularly infertility and the health of children born to older parents.

Another NICHD focus is to examine the idea that fertility status can be a marker for overall health. Chronic conditions such as cancer, diabetes and obesity are known to impair fertility; however, less is known about the extent to which fertility status can impact or act as a marker for overall health. Data suggest that infertility is not necessarily a unique disease of the reproductive axis, but is often linked with other diseases and conditions. Recent studies demonstrate links between fertility status in both males and females to various bodily diseases and disorders. These findings when examined together suggest that fertility status can be a window into overall health.

More women's health research to understand reproductive aging and fertility status will likely improve our understanding of the aging process and offer insight to reduce the onset of age-related disease.

**Contributed by John S. Davis, PhD**  
*UNMC Department of OB-GYN*

Anxiety *continued from pg. 1*

We all experience anxiety differently, and the severity of the anxiety can range from mild to severe. In our clinical practice, we have found that for some individuals, managing and coping with anxiety can be a challenging, ongoing process. Some helpful coping strategies we teach others to use include the following:

- Identify how anxiety affects you – in your body and in your thoughts, and then what you do in response to those feelings
- Test your thinking: What are the odds of your fearful predictions truly happening – and if they do, how would you cope?
- Practice relaxation techniques such as mindfulness exercises
- Try facing your fears! If you feel the anxiety is irrational or excessive, challenging it head-on gives your anxious brain a chance to learn that it was a false alarm
- Consider medications if you feel you need additional help with managing the intensity of your symptoms

Additional resources also include the University of Michigan's Anxiety Manual which is free and includes tips to manage anxiety. The manual is used as part of the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Basic Group for Anxiety, a four-week program offered at Nebraska Medicine to help anyone living with anxiety learn evidence-based coping tools. If you believe you need additional, individualized psychological support, locate a mental health care provider in your community who specializes in working with anxiety disorders.

If you would like to learn more about anxiety and ways to manage it, we will be providing a joint presentation at the upcoming virtual Omaha Women's Health and Wellness Conference on Friday, Oct. 8. Our presentation will include information on anxiety and different anxiety disorders, as well as cognitive-behavioral and pharmacological treatments. We will talk about why it is helpful to learn to manage anxiety and avoid making it worse. Finally, we will identify adaptive, healthy coping strategies and demonstrate how to manage anxious thoughts.

**Contributed by Lauren Edwards, MD and Emaan Lehardy, PhD**

*UNMC Department of Psychiatry | Nebraska Medicine Psychology Department*

## I'm Pregnant, Now What?

Establishing early prenatal care is one of the essential building blocks of a healthy pregnancy. The Olson Center for Women's Health has recently developed a new process to help coordinate this important and exciting start.

During a telehealth video or phone call, a provider can help customize a plan of care based on personal history. Families can relax in the comfort of their home and take the time to ask questions, ease concerns and receive important pregnancy-related education. Prenatal lab work and referrals are ordered, including referral to the Olson Center Early Pregnancy Assessment Clinic for ultrasound prior to the initial OB appointment if necessary.

For women who have problems in early pregnancy (like bleeding or pain) - or who may want some additional reassurance regarding their new pregnancy - the Early Pregnancy Assessment Clinic (EPAC) may be a great first stop. Women can be scheduled for an appointment with the EPAC clinic by talking with an Olson Center nurse.

This personalized appointment ensures a seamless transition into the beginning of your extraordinary pregnancy journey at the Olson Center for Women's Health. Call 402.559.4500 to get your early pregnancy telehealth call scheduled.

**Contributed by Calida Gardner, CNM, MSN and Jennifer Griffin, MD, MPH**

*UNMC Department of OB-GYN*



**OLSON CENTER  
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH**

### *Mission Statement*

The mission of the Olson Center for Women's Health is to provide a national comprehensive health science center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). Based in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the center enables UNMC to make distinctive strides in education, research and service through innovative approaches to women's health issues.

### *Want More Information?*

Visit our website:

**[nebraskamed.com/olson-center](http://nebraskamed.com/olson-center)**

Learn more about our health care providers, services and programs available at the Olson Center for Women's Health. Our website also offers women's health information. Here are a few topics:

- Breastfeeding
- Breast health and disease
- Cardiovascular health
- Gastrointestinal health
- Gynecologic health
- Incontinence
- Reproductive endocrinology/infertility
- Pregnancy
- Wellness

### *Newsletter Committee*

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Join us virtually for our  
24<sup>th</sup> Annual



Omaha  
*Women's*  
Health & Wellness  
Conference

*Rejoining Life: Finding My New Normal*

Oct. 8, 2021

## 2021 Conference Agenda

- 8 a.m. **"Making Peace with Your Enemies: Understand Your Anxiety to Conquer Your Fears!"**  
Lauren Edwards, MD and Emaan Lehardy, PhD
- 10 a.m. **"Food and Feelings: Maintaining Healthy Eating Patterns During COVID-19"**  
Kimberly Vacek, PhD
- 11 a.m. **"Living in a Women's World: Understanding the Priority of Your Health"**  
Emily Hill, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC and Nicole Goliber, PA-C
- 11:50 a.m. *Lunch*
- 1 p.m. **"Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) in Women: Today's Approach"**  
Kathryn Hutchins, MD
- 2 p.m. **"Modern Menopause: Optimizing Mental and Physical Wellness"**  
Jennifer Griffin, MD, MPH
- 3 p.m. **"The Evolution of COVID-19 and Associated Racial Disparities: A National Emergency"**  
Jasmine Riviere Marcelin, MD
- 4 p.m. **"Within Hindsight There is the Deep Wisdom of Insight"**  
Havalynn Russell, interior life designer who has grown through mental health and addiction recovery challenges

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## Registration Deadline: Friday, Oct. 1

We are committed to your safety. Due to the rise in COVID-19 cases, this year's conference will be an online only event on Oct. 8.

Please note: A valid email address is required to attend this online conference.

General attendance for the conference is free. ANCC contact hours will be available for all sessions; cost is \$30.

You may register online with a credit card at [OmahaWomensHealthAndWellness.com](http://OmahaWomensHealthAndWellness.com). Check and mail order payment methods also accepted. Please note: There is a 2.75% fee for credit card transactions.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening phone: \_\_\_\_\_

RN/LPN license number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Specialty: \_\_\_\_\_



JOINTLY ACCREDITED PROVIDER™  
INTERPROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION

In support of improving patient care, this activity has been planned and implemented by University of Nebraska Medical Center and Olson Center for Women's Health. University of Nebraska Medical Center is jointly accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), to provide continuing education for the health care team.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center designates this activity for **6.50** ANCC contact hours. Nurses should only claim credit for the actual time spent participating in this activity.

### Make check or money order to: University of Nebraska Medical Center

Mail check and registration form to:

Omaha Women's Health and Wellness Conference  
Olson Center for Women's Health  
989450 Nebraska Medical Center  
Omaha, NE 68198-9450

## Questions?

Call the Olson Women's Health  
Resource Center at 402.559.6345



## OLSON CENTER FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

[nebraskamed.com/olson-center](http://nebraskamed.com/olson-center)

## *current events*

### Tuesday Evening Clinic Now Available at the Olson Center for Women's Health

At the Olson Center, we understand life gets busy. We know scheduling a doctor's appointment during a lunch break isn't always possible, or sometimes you just want to avoid the rush hour traffic. To help make scheduling your health care appointments easier, we are excited to offer extended hours on Tuesday nights from 5 to 8 p.m.

Our OB-GYN clinic is a multi-faceted comprehensive health center designed around women's needs. At our Tuesday Night Clinic, you can expect the same exceptional care from our talented team. We are offering this evening clinic to women of all ages for all health concerns. These services include contraceptive care, new and return obstetric care checks, well woman annual exams and post-partum care.

The last OB-GYN appointment for Tuesdays will be scheduled at 7:30 p.m. Call today at 402.559.4500 to schedule your appointment.

## *in this issue*

### **Page 1** Coping with Anxiety in These Uncertain Times

Anxiety affects over 40 million adults in the U.S.

### **Page 3** Research News: Reproductive Aging and Women's Health

### **Page 5** Omaha Women's Health and Wellness Conference

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