

# **Anxiety**

## **A self help guide**

***Are you a worrier? Are you bad with your nerves? Are you unable to relax?***

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then this self help guide aims to help you.

### **What is anxiety?**

Anxiety is something we all experience from time to time. It is a normal response to a situation that we feel could cause us harm. Our bodies respond to fearful situations by going into fight or flight mode. Your body prepares itself to either fight danger or to run away. Your heart beats faster, you sweat, your mouth becomes dry. You are on high alert as adrenaline shoots around your body as it prepares you for danger. When you realise that there is no danger the feelings of fear die away. However, for some people the feelings of fear and being in danger never die away and anxiety becomes uncomfortable, frightening, debilitating and affects physical and mental wellbeing. Any threat to our emotional wellbeing can trigger the fight or flight response and people experience anxiety due to stressful life events such as divorce, loss and bereavement, work or home pressures, family problems, exams, money worries, etc

### **How does anxiety affect us?**

It affects the way we feel: panicky, unsettled, stressed, nervous, frightened,  
It affects the way we think: constant worrying, can't concentrate, racing thoughts, dwelling on the worse

It affects the way our body works: butterflies, jumpy, sweaty, pounding heart, lightheaded

It affects the way we behave: pacing, snappy, avoid feared situations, start jobs but do not finish

### **What keeps anxiety going?**

- Some people have anxious personalities and have developed a habit of feeling anxious
- Some people have ongoing stress which means that they feel no escape from anxiety
- Sometimes a vicious circle of anxiety develops where our symptoms, thoughts and behaviours keep the anxiety going
- Some people avoid situations that make them feel stressed. This results in a loss of confidence, which then affects how you feel about yourself, which then makes you feel more anxious- another vicious circle.

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### **Tips to help you manage your anxiety**

#### **1. Understand your anxiety better.**

Ask yourself - Is it related to certain situations, places, or people? Is it worse at a particular time of day? Is it affected by what you put into your body?

Ask yourself are your worries realistic, would they make anyone anxious?

Keep a diary for a period of two weeks and notice what triggers your anxiety and rate it on a scale of 0-10. This will help you to become more aware of the situations that make you anxious or that you avoid.

#### **2. Reduce physical symptoms.**

Once you notice the physical symptoms of anxiety try to nip them in the bud. You can use techniques such as relaxation, exercise, reading a book, watching a film, listening to music. You may find apps such as Calm a useful tool to help you.

Breathing mindfully can also help you to reduce your physical symptoms. Remember although anxiety can feel uncomfortable it is not harmful or dangerous.

#### **3. Alter your thoughts related to anxiety.**

Our thoughts are the driving force behind the vicious circle of anxiety. Keep a diary of your thoughts in situations where you feel anxious. Then ask yourself; am I exaggerating? Am I jumping to conclusions? Am I focusing on just the bad things? Can you replace your anxious thoughts with more balanced thoughts?

#### **4. Change your behaviours related to anxiety.**

Try to recognise when you avoid things and slowly try to tackle these fears. Set yourself small goals and tackle the easiest one first. Try not to avoid situations that make you feel anxious but slowly spend time in them, even if it is just for a short period to start with. The more you avoid something the more difficult it will be to overcome, which will in turn make you feel more anxious.

#### **5. Replace negative self-talk with reassuring self-talk**

Instead of saying "I can't do this, it's too hard" replace it with more positive talk and say, "it may be difficult, but I can get through this". It can be helpful to make a list of all the negative thoughts you have and write a list of positive believable thoughts to replace them. You can take charge of your own thoughts.

#### **6. Remember change does not happen overnight.**

You need to persevere. All it takes is one small step in the right direction.

#### **7. Talk to a professional.**

If you find that you have tried different techniques and are still not feeling in control of your anxiety talk to someone that can help.

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