

Understanding Anxiety & Tips to Cope

Everybody experiences anxiety at some time. Anxiety is a natural response, useful in helping us to avoid dangerous situations and motivating us to solve everyday problems. Anxiety can vary in severity from mild uneasiness through to a terrifying panic attack. It can vary in how long it lasts, from a few moments to many years. An anxiety disorder differs from normal anxiety; it is more severe, it is long-lasting and it interferes with the person's work or relationships.

General Symptoms of Anxiety –

Anxiety can manifest itself in a variety of ways; physical, biological and behavioural, an individual may experience more than one of these symptoms at a time - examples of these symptoms are detailed below:

- **Physical effects:**
 - Palpitations, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, flushing (cardiovascular)
 - Hyperventilation, shortness of breath (respiratory)
 - Dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling and numbness (neurological)
 - Choking, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, urinary frequency, diarrhoea (gastrointestinal)
 - Muscle aches and pains (especially neck, shoulders and lower back), restlessness, tremor and shaking (musculoskeletal)
- **Psychological effects:**
 - Unrealistic and/or excessive fear and worry (about past or future events)
 - Mind racing or going blank
 - Decreased concentration and memory
 - Difficulty making decisions
 - Irritability, impatience, anger
 - Confusion
 - Restlessness or feeling on edge, nervousness
 - Tiredness, sleep disturbances, vivid dreams
 - Unwanted unpleasant repetitive thoughts (also known as intrusive thoughts)
- **Behavioural effects:**
 - Avoidance of situations
 - Repetitive compulsive behaviour, e.g. excessive checking, continual seeking of reassurance
 - Distress in social situations
 - Urges to escape situations that cause discomfort (phobic behaviour)

Tips to cope with Anxiety –

Understand your anxiety

Try keeping a diary of what you are doing and how you feel at different times to help identify what's worrying you and what you can do to alleviate your worries.

Challenge your anxious thoughts

Tackling unhelpful thoughts is one of the best things we can do to feel less anxious and manage any ongoing anxiety.

Make time for “worries”

If your worry feels overwhelming and takes over your day, put aside time for “worry time” to go through your concerns each day and write them down.

Shift your focus

Some people find relaxation, massage, exercise, mindfulness or breathing exercises helpful. They reduce tension and focus our awareness on the present moment.

Face the things you want to and try to avoid

It's easy to avoid situations, or rely on habits that make us feel safer, but these can keep anxiety going. By slowly addressing your concerns and considering the skills you have to help you through difficult situations, your anxious feelings will gradually reduce and you will begin to see that even the most difficult situation can be tackled given the right mind-set, support and belief in yourself.

Understanding the issues causing concern

When you're feeling stressed or anxious, it can help to try and identify some solutions. This can make the challenges you're facing feel more manageable. It is also important to recognise that there may not always be a solution to a problem or situation that is making you anxious, but that practicing the above points can enable us to cope better.

If you feel you may need some support, you can also contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.