

Anxiety

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future.

Anxiety is a natural human response when we feel that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

Most people feel anxious at times. Its particularly common to experience some anxiety whilst coping with stressful events or changes, especially if they have a big impact on your life.

'Fight, flight or freeze response'

Like all animals, human beings have evolved ways to help us protect ourselves from danger. When we feel under threat our bodies react by releasing certain hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, which can be helpful.

These hormones:

- Make us feel more alert, so we can act faster
- Make our hearts beat faster, quickly sending blood to where its needed most.

After we feel the threat has passed, our bodies release other hormones to help our muscles relax. This can sometimes cause us to shake.

Anxiety can feel like a swarm of bees buzzing, not stopping, making it impossible to focus and seemingly impossible to slow down and take a breath.



Symptoms of anxiety

Anxiety feels different for everyone. You may feel some of the physical and mental effects listed below, as well as effects in other areas of your life.

Anxiety on the body:

- a churning feeling in your stomach
- feeling light-headed or dizzy
- pins and needles
- feeling restless or unable to sit still
- headaches, backache or other aches and pains
- faster breathing
- a fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat
- sweating or hot flushes
- Sleep problems
- grinding your teeth, especially at night
- nausea (feeling sick)
- needing the toilet more or less often
- Having panic attacks



Anxiety on the mind:

- feeling tense, nervous or unable to relax
- having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst
- feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down
- feeling like other people can see you're anxious and are looking at you
- feeling like you can't stop worrying, or that bad things will happen if you stop worrying
- worrying about anxiety itself, for example worrying about when panic attacks might happen
- wanting lots of reassurance from other people or worrying that people are angry or upset with you
- worrying that you're losing touch with reality
- depersonalisation – a type of dissociation where you feel disconnected from your mind or body, or like you are a character that you are watching in a film

What is a panic attack?

Panic attacks are a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of your body's normal response to danger, stress or excitement.

During a panic attack, physical symptoms can build up very quickly. These can include:

- a pounding or racing heartbeat
 - feeling faint, dizzy or light-headed
 - feeling very hot or very cold
 - sweating, trembling or shaking
 - nausea (feeling sick)
 - pain in your chest or abdomen
 - struggling to breathe or feeling like you're choking
 - feeling like your legs are shaky or are turning to jelly
- feeling disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings, which are types of **dissociation**.

During a panic attack you might feel very afraid that you're:

- losing control
- going to faint
- having a heart attack
- going to die.

Why do panic attacks happen?

-Past or childhood experiences

-Current life situation (Feeling under pressure, exhaustion, housing problems, feeling lonely or isolated)



What helps to manage panic attacks?

Most panic attacks last between 5 to 20 minutes. They can come on very quickly. Your symptoms will usually be at their worst within 10 minutes. You might also experience symptoms of a panic attack over a longer period of time.

Panic attacks can be frightening, but there are things you can do to help yourself cope. It could help to print off these tips, or write them down, and keep them somewhere easy to find.

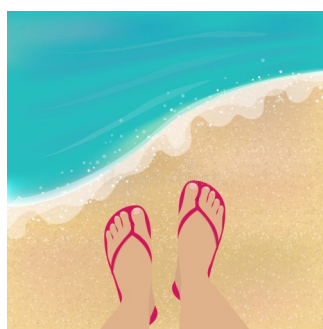
During a panic attack:

- **Focus on your breathing.** It can help to concentrate on breathing slowly in and out while counting to five.
- **Stamp on the spot.** Some people find this helps control their breathing.
- **Focus on your senses.** For example, taste mint-flavoured sweets or gum, or touch or cuddle something soft.
- **Try grounding techniques.** Grounding techniques can help you feel more in control. They're especially useful if you experience dissociation during panic attacks.

Grounding techniques can keep you connected to the present and help you avoid feelings, memories, flashbacks or intrusive thoughts that you don't feel able to cope with yet. You could try:

- breathing slowly
- listening to sounds around you
- walking barefoot
- wrapping yourself in a blanket and feeling it around you
- touching something or sniffing something with a strong smell.

Focus on the sensations you are feeling right now. You might find it helpful to keep a box of things with different textures and smells (for example perfume, a blanket and some smooth stones) ready for when you need it.



How can I help myself?

Living with anxiety can be very difficult, but there are steps you can take that might help. This page has some suggestions for you to consider.

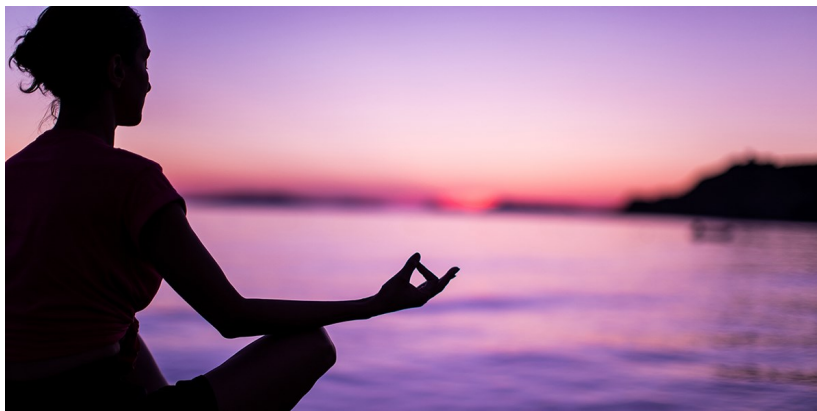
- Talk to someone you trust
- Try to manage your worries
- Look after your physical health– make sure you get enough sleep, take some exercise
- Try breathing exercises (Breathe in for 4 seconds, breathe out for 6)
- Keep a diary
- Try peer support
- Complimentary therapies such as mindfulness and yoga

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a technique you can learn which involves noticing what's happening in the present moment, without judgement. You might take notice and be aware of your mind, body or surroundings. The technique has roots in Buddhism and meditation, but you don't have to be spiritual, or have any particular beliefs, to try it.

Mindfulness aims to help you:

- become more self-aware
 - feel calmer and less stressed
 - feel more able to choose how to respond to your thoughts and feelings
 - cope with difficult or unhelpful thoughts
- be kinder towards yourself.



Talking therapies

CBT

Cognitive behavioural therapy– This focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and behaviour, and teaches you coping skills for dealing with different problems.

Relaxation

Breathing:

“Slow Diaphragmatic Breathing”



1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor. You can lie down if you wish.
2. Fold your hands on your belly.
3. Breathe in slowly and calmly. Fill up the belly with a normal breath. Try not to breathe in too heavily. The hands should move up when you breathe in, as if you are filling up a balloon. Avoid lifting the shoulders as you inhale; rather, breathe into the stomach.
4. Breathe out slowly to the count of “5.” Try to slow down the rate of the exhale. After the exhale, hold for 2-3 seconds before inhaling again.
5. Work to continue to slow down the pace of the breath.
6. Practice this for about 10 minutes.
7. This works best if you practice this two times each day for 10 minutes each time. Try to find a regular time to practice this each day

“Soothing” Activities

- Sounds: music you enjoy; ambient music; “new age,” repetitive music; sounds of nature, such as babbling brooks or ocean waves
- Smells (Aromatherapy): incense, candles, etc.
- Sights: Visualization: beaches, falling leaves, etc.
- Nature: hiking, swimming, parks, etc. “



Depersonalisation

What is Depersonalisation?

Depersonalisation is the experience of feeling unreal, detached and often feeling distant from your own emotions. Sometimes this means the person feels like they are a spectator in their own life. It is a phenomenon characterised by a disruption in self awareness and emotional numbness.

Occasionally there is also the feeling of being on 'automatic pilot' and having the sensation of being an outside observer of his/her mental processes. Some liken it to what they would believe to be an 'out of body' experience.

Depersonalisation is a normal experience, occurring in most healthy people from time to time, particularly when tired or in environments which are monotonous, echoing and so on; for example, large swimming baths, shopping malls, on motorways, etc. Many people experiencing anxiety disorders and depressive disorders experience such symptoms more frequently.

If feeling depersonalised is so common, why does it upset people?

Most commonly, it is because the person is understandably frightened by the experience, thinking that it means that they are going mad, having a stroke or that they are going to pass out. Once they have experienced that fear, they focus on the possibility of having further episodes.

Unfortunately, when you 'look for trouble', trouble is what you find! We know that paying attention to depersonalisation increases the chance that you will notice it. Anxiety can also increase depersonalisation. The combination of paying attention to and being frightened by the feelings of depersonalisation creates a vicious circle which can end up in the person becoming intensely preoccupied by their feelings, to the point that it interferes with their daily lives.

Depersonalisation is similar to déjà vu! It just feels more intense and can last for longer.

Treatment:

- Talking therapies– CBT
- Mindfulness and meditation
- Grounding techniques
- Visualisation

