



Anxiety

What is anxiety?

We have all experienced anxiety where we fear that something unpleasant is about to happen. People often become anxious when they face difficult situations such as illness, unemployment, moving house, or job interviews. Mild anxiety prior to an examination, for example, can be useful as it can make you feel more alert and enhance your performance. Mild, short-term anxiety is extremely common, however, for some people anxiety can become so extreme that it affects day-to-day functioning. A doctor may make a diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder if a person has been experiencing a high level of tension and anxiety for several months for no clear reason.

Causes of anxiety

Anxiety can occur in people from all backgrounds, any occupation, and at any time of life. There is no one cause for anxiety for some people anxiety begins after a long period of stress that has gradually built up. Other people may feel they are not in control of certain aspects of their life, and may develop a general anxiety about the future. Some people may have experienced stressful life events in the past and become anxious about encountering similar experiences in the future. Some people appear to have a genetic predisposition towards anxiety; certainly there is an increased risk of developing anxiety problems if there is a family history of anxiety. There is also evidence that anxiety problems can be caused by physical factors such as over-activity of the thyroid gland and can also be caused as a side effect of certain drugs including commonly prescribed antidepressants. Anxiety is also a common symptom of withdrawal effects such as benzodiazepine and some recreational drugs.

Symptoms of anxiety

Anxiety can affect you both physically and mentally.

Psychological symptoms

Anxiety can cause a change in your behaviour, and the way that you think and feel about things. Some psychological symptoms are:

Restlessness, Feeling 'on edge', Difficulty concentrating, Irritability, Easily distracted.

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Physical symptoms

Anxiety can also affect you physically these can include:

Dizziness, Lethargy, Palpitations, Muscle aches, Dry mouth, Sweating, Shortness of breath, Stomach ache, Diarrhoea, Headache, Excessive thirst, Difficulty in falling, or staying, asleep.

What sort of help is available to me?

Most people diagnosed with anxiety are treated by their doctor, although a small minority of people may be referred to a psychiatrist, or a member of the local Community Mental health Team for more specialized help. Depending on your symptoms, the severity of the anxiety, and your circumstances, the doctor may suggest some form of talking treatment or medication or a combination of these treatments.

Anxiety treatment options

Medication - A variety of medications, including antidepressants and anxiolytic drugs, also known as minor tranquillizers, can be used to ease the symptoms of anxiety. For some people medication is all that would be needed for others a better outcome is reached through a combination of medication and therapy.

Talking treatments - Talking treatments alone can be effective in treating anxiety for some people, for others a combination of talking treatments and drug treatment may be the most effective treatment. Talking treatments aim to help people recognize the stress factors in their lives, and work out coping strategies in order to be able to deal with these. A wide variety of talking treatments are available, ranging from counselling and psychotherapy to cognitive behaviour therapy.

Relaxation techniques - When practiced regularly, relaxation techniques such as meditation, muscle relaxation, controlled breathing, and visualization can reduce anxiety and increase feelings of relaxation and emotional well-being. [See my self-help guide for a Daily Relaxation Technique](#)

Distraction Techniques - Anything that focuses your thoughts from feeling anxious can be a wonderful relief. For example: puzzles, crafts, gardening (even just pulling weeds), video/P.C games, light reading, TV, exercise and even housework.

Physical Activity - Many of the physical symptoms of anxiety can be attributed to an excess of hormones, such as adrenalin, in your system. Although it may be difficult finding the motivation to exercise, it can be very therapeutic to take part in physical

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activities. Jogging, swimming, sports; even brisk walking can help to use up any excess adrenalin.

Care for yourself - You will feel better if you are able to eat properly, if you don't over do alcohol or drugs. Keep in touch with family and friends.

Complementary therapies - The following are non-medical treatments that some people find helpful. Massage can help to alleviate stress and anxiety making you feel better. Some people benefit from meditation, yoga, homeopathy and acupuncture.

Useful Organizations

SANEline

www.sane.org.uk

SANEline offers emotional support and information to those experiencing mental health problems, their families and carers.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

web: www.bacp.co.uk

Directory of Counsellors and Psychotherapists.

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)

web: www.babcp.com

Directory of psychotherapists.

No Panic

web: www.nopanic.org.uk

Information and support line for people experiencing anxiety problems.

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