



These things are normal when you are anxious





and these also ...





The Very Real Experience of Anxiety

Known to us all is the feeling of anxiety. That strong feeling that we get when we are faced with a challenge that sends us into fight or flight mode. Our hearts start to race, breathing becomes laboured, our throats tighten, stomachs churn, our legs turn to jelly - we are ANXIOUS. The primitive part of our brain has detected a threat to our survival based on memories and thoughts. We are very quick to predict disaster and will do so using our worse memories. The “caveman” part of our brain sends signals to activate the release of stress hormones (including adrenaline) into the blood stream that induces changes in the body to promote fighting or running away. This is our human survival response and it has not changed for millions of years, hence the reference to caveman. Stress hormones in the blood stream will make immediate changes to the body such as:

- Breathing becomes rapid or shallow, the aim being to get more oxygen into the lungs and blood which is then carried to the muscles.
- The liver releases fatty acids and sugar into the blood for a surge of energy.
- To get vital energy and oxygen into the muscles as quickly as possible the blood pressure and heart rate will increase. This is when we get the heart pounding sensation.
- Blood is diverted away from the skin surface to the major muscles. With this occurs a heating effect so the body reacts by cooling itself through sweating.
- Tenseness and trembling will be felt in the major muscles because they are getting ready to act.

For some people their fears, thoughts and worries can be overwhelming, and this leads to interference in their daily lives. For example, feelings of apprehension are excessive, concentration is hard to achieve, easily startled, tenseness, constantly anticipating the worse, irritability, restlessness, hypervigilance and the mind often goes blank. These are all emotional symptoms of anxiety and maybe point to an anxiety disorder. Together with all of this, will likely be the physical symptoms of insomnia, shortness of breath, muscle tension,



racing heartbeat, stomach upsets, dizziness, sweating, frequent need to urinate or diarrhoea, tremors and twitches, fatigue and headaches or migraines.

As you've just read, there is a lot to contend with. Anxiety is not straight forward nor is it a minor ailment. Every emotional and physical symptom is a clue to our sense of self – how we are experiencing the present moment and most importantly it is telling us that action needs to be taken. Working with clients and knowing my own anxiety tells me that ignoring anxiety is a bad idea because it is likely to worsen and limit your world. Later in this leaflet you will be invited to try lots of ways to cope with your anxiety. There is hope and plenty of options for you to try.

Possible Causes of Anxiety

You may have noticed that some people are more prone to bouts of anxiety than others. This may be down to poor eating habits, high sugar and caffeine intake, having a physical health condition, genetic tendency (it can run in families), pressure at work or study, socialising, exhaustion, worrying about money, adverse childhood experiences.

Types of Anxiety

There different types of anxiety. Try to resist the temptation to diagnose yourself, it will doubtless alarm you further. GPs have trained for many years and are there to help you with your mental health just as much as your physical health. If in doubt seek help as soon as you spot that anxiety is interfering with your quality of life. These are some terms you may come across:

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), Anxiety attacks (Panic disorder), Phobia, Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), **Social anxiety disorder**, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

The Brutal Facts About Anxiety

Talk to anyone who has and suffers with anxiety and they will probably tell you that it is debilitating and has the power to spoil joyful times in their lives. Some even stop doing things, thinking it will go away. Unfortunately, that is not how it works. The more you avoid things, the more withdrawn from life you will become. I need to stress that each individual will have a different experience of anxiety.



What is shared by **EVERYONE** is the **persistent or severe worry/fear** in situations that others feel okay about. As we learnt earlier in this leaflet, anxiety is a product of our bodies' fight-or-flight response. Stemming from the same biological vulnerability is depression and therefore, it is not uncommon for those suffering with an anxiety disorder to experience depression at some point. As well as intense irrational worry and fear, there may be these emotional symptoms too;

relentless obsessions, **BLURRED VISION**, terrible thoughts, exhausting compulsions, deep sadness, *vague sense of fear and nervousness all the time*, thoughts that mushroom, scare and distress you, churning stomach, sweaty palms, **CHEST PAINS**, dizziness, **headaches**, twitchy eyes, teeth grinding and then an achy jaw, *restless legs*, ringing sound in the ears, hot face, nausea, difficulty breathing, **panic attacks**, difficulty in expressing oneself.

The Top Ten Popular Cognitive Distortions That Fuel Anxiety

1. All or nothing thinking. Everything is viewed as either black or white, good or bad.
2. Catastrophising. "The sea is choppy; we are going to sink"
3. Labelling. "I am stupid and a failure"
4. The mental filter. Focusing on the negatives whilst filtering out the positives.
5. Personalisation. Taking responsibility for life events that are outside your control.
6. Overgeneralising. "I didn't pass my driving test. I'll never, ever pass and get a car of my own"
7. 'Shoulds' and 'should-nots'. Restricting yourself to a list of what you can and can't do.
8. Jumping to conclusions. Negative predictions and interpretations of situations "I can tell she doesn't like me"
9. Emotional reasoning. Convincing yourself that what you are feeling reflects reality. "I am scared so I must be in danger"
10. Diminishing the positive. Discounting positive events. "I got an excellent appraisal but know I could have worked harder"



Anxiety (Panic) Attacks

For some people the fear and panic become intense very suddenly without warning and an anxiety or panic attack will ensue. Attacks most often peak within ten minutes and seldom last longer than thirty minutes. The trigger is sometimes known and sometimes not known. Anxiety attacks are akin to feeling as if you are going to die because the terror and lack of control that is felt is extremely intense. Its hardly surprising that many believe they are having a heart attack. Once the attack has subsided it tends to leave the person worried about it occurring again.

Towards Recovery

The best way to tackle anxiety is to understand it as much as you can. This includes the roots (we can mirror anxious traits by being around people with anxiety) and triggers to your anxiety and training yourself to relate to the thoughts and sensations in healthier ways. Here are some ideas for you to try:

1. Ask yourself this question: “What do I do when I am not worrying?” Look and pay attention to the moments of lightness in your life.
2. Try this technique, it may help combat anxiety. Think **STRENGTHS - RESOURCES - WHAT’S MISSING - RECONNECTION**
 - S - focus on your strengths
 - R - identify the resources you have lost contact with
 - W - what resource have you overlooked or not learnt correctly
 - R - reconnect with those resources
3. Pause and step back from the situation. This will provide space and time for slowing reactions.
4. Spend time in nature.
5. Connect to body, self, others, nature.
6. Reframe your thoughts by adopting another perspective.
7. Explore catastrophic thoughts **BUT DO NOT** trust them. Your primitive brain is mistakenly predicting life-or-death scenarios.
8. Breathe deeply (in through your nose for five and out through your mouth for five) for a few minutes and tell yourself “Its ok, this will pass”



9. Respond to your inner critic with kindness and compassion. Do not feed the inner critic by believing it.
10. Slow down your movements. Do everything in slow motion.
11. Find anchor points by noticing what is around you and activate all five senses. What can you smell? What can you feel? What can you see? What can you hear? What can you taste?
12. Stay focused on the present. Ground yourself by pushing both feet firmly into the ground or stand with your back to a solid wall.
13. Seek help, do not ignore it and do not collude with anxiety. It will limit your world.
14. Sip water.
15. Tell yourself “there is no threat, everything is ok, be calm”. Let your worries go.
16. Get enough sleep, eat and drink healthily.
17. Take regular exercise that you enjoy.
18. Keep yourself as stress free as you can remembering to ask yourself “Is this really my dilemma or does it belong to someone else?”
19. Talk about your anxiety with someone who cares and understand you. Avoid people who make you anxious (if possible).
20. Avoid caffeine and alcohol
21. Write about it.
22. Turn off your phone. Ban yourself from social media.
23. Have a bubble bath.

Above all be kind and compassionate to yourself and hang onto hope.

Professional Help

Treatment for anxiety disorders is very effective. Your GP will be able to determine what is the best treatment for you. Sometimes medication is prescribed and/or counselling sought. Counselling is available on the NHS or you can self-refer and find yourself a private Counsellor. Complimentary or alternative treatments are other options to consider.



My Final Thoughts

With increased self-awareness and embracing your feelings your anxious cycle has a strong chance of diminishing. Worrying temporarily suppresses your emotions. Once you stop worrying the emotions will take hold. Emotions cannot be avoided forever. So, it is best to deal with them when they first arise. **Acknowledging. Accepting. Embracing your feelings is part of being human.**

REMEMBER: you CAN have influence over your experience by utilising your self-awareness. Self-awareness offers you the space between action and reaction. Be more than your anxiety. Be the person you want to be.

REMEMBER: moderate anxiety is a good thing because it can help us stay alert and focused and motivate us to solve problems.

REMEMBER: anxiety is part of being human. Without it we would be cold and calculating.

REMEMBER: research shows that a small amount of anxiety and arousal aids performance.



Useful links

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/generalised-anxiety-disorder/self-help/>

<https://www.nopanic.org.uk/>

NHS APPS: <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/overcome-fear-anxiety>

https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/?gclid=EAAlaQobChMI4Nrg_enD4wIVR7TtChOlpACzEAAAYAAAEgLPQfD_BwE

<https://www.giveusashout.org/>

PODCAST: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/how-overcome-fear-and-anxiety>

<https://www.facebook.com/anxietyuk/>

COUNSELLING

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/how-to-find-a-therapist/>

<https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/>