



Fear & Anxiety...

Everybody feels anxious from time-to-time – it's a normal response to stressful situations. In some cases it can improve performance. But for some people anxiety becomes severe or prolonged and interferes with everyday life. This is called an anxiety disorder. Treatment may involve different types of therapy, medicines or a combination of these.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease. Everybody experiences it when faced with a stressful situation, for example before an exam or an interview, or during a worrying time such as illness. It's normal to feel anxious when facing something difficult or dangerous. Mild anxiety can be a positive and useful experience in providing adrenaline to cope with the situation.

However, for one in 10 people in the UK, anxiety interferes with normal life. Excessive anxiety is often associated with other mental health problems, such as depression. Anxiety is only considered to be a mental health problem when it is prolonged, severe and is interfering with everyday activities.

Symptoms of anxiety

When you're anxious, you may also experience a range of physical symptoms. These happen because of the bodies' so-called "fight or flight" response, which is caused by the release of the stress hormone adrenaline.

The symptoms can include:

- Abdominal discomfort
- Diarrhoea
- Dry mouth

- Rapid heartbeat or palpitations
- Tightness or pain in chest
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Frequent urination
- Difficulty swallowing
- Shaking

Psychological symptoms can include:

- Insomnia
- Feeling worried or uneasy all the time
- Feeling tired
- Being irritable or quick to anger
- An inability to concentrate
- A fear that you are going "mad"
- Feeling unreal and not in control of your actions (depersonalisation), or detached from your surroundings (derealisation)

Causes of anxiety disorders

Anxiety may be a symptom of other mental health problems, such as depression or alcohol dependence. It can also be caused by substances such as ecstasy or caffeine, or by withdrawal from long-term drugs like tranquillisers.

Sometimes anxiety can be associated with a physical illness, such as thyroid disorder. For this reason it's advisable to see your GP in order to rule out a physical cause.

How to deal with anxiety & fear

Counselling

Counselling, or talking therapies, involves talking to someone who is trained to help you deal with your negative feelings.

Talking therapies give people the chance to explore their thoughts and feelings and the effect they have on their behaviour and mood.

Describing what's going on in your head and how that makes you feel can help you notice any patterns which it may be helpful to change.

It can help you work out where your negative feelings and ideas come from and why they are there.

Understanding all this can help people make positive changes by thinking or acting differently. Talking therapies can help people to take greater control of their lives and improve their confidence. They can help anyone who is experiencing distress.

You do not have to be told by a doctor that you have a mental health problem to be offered or benefit from a talking therapy.

Support groups

You can learn a lot about managing anxiety from asking other people who have experienced it. Local support groups or self-help groups bring together people with similar experiences so they can hear each other's stories, share tips and encourage each other to try out new ways of managing their worries.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

This is a form of psychotherapy carried out by a specially trained therapist. Cognitive therapy involves assessing the reasoning behind your thinking – it is based on the idea that abnormal thinking results in abnormal reactions. Behavioural therapy aims to change behaviour – usually you are gradually exposed to the situation that causes anxiety.

Exercise

Increase the amount of exercise you take. This can trigger brain chemicals that improve your mood. Exercise needs concentration, and this can take your mind off fear and anxiety.

Healthy eating

Eat lots of fruit and vegetables and try to avoid too much sugar. Dips in your blood sugar can give you anxious feelings. Try to avoid drinking too much tea or coffee as caffeine can increase anxiety levels.

Medication

Drug treatments are used to provide short-term help, rather than as a cure for anxiety problems. Drugs may be most useful when they are combined with other treatments or support.

Relaxation

Relaxation training is a feature of some types of psychotherapy. Various types of relaxation therapy are available – you might want to discuss this with your doctor. Some people may find yoga, Thai Chi or other exercises helpful.

For more help or information, visit your GP or contact:

Atrium Clinic and Therapy Centre
13 Weston Road, Southend
01702 342 256
www.atriumclinic.co.uk

For more background reading:

Mental Health Foundation
020 780 31101
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

All enquiries are dealt with compassionately, efficiently and in the strictest confidence.

A GP referral is not essential for self-funding patients

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