

Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear and can be experienced as physical or psychological symptoms, usually both.

Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life, for example feeling worried about sitting an exam, having a medical test or job interview. Feeling anxious is sometimes perfectly normal.

How common is anxiety?

Anxiety is known to be one of the most prevalent mental health problems in the UK and elsewhere, yet it is still under-reported, under-diagnosed and under-treated (mental health foundation). The Royal College of Psychiatrists estimate that approximately 1 in 10 people will have troublesome anxiety or phobias at some point in their lives.

Surveys suggest that generalized anxiety disorder affects about 1 in 20 adults in the UK. Slightly more women are affected than men, and the condition is most common in people in their 20s.

Anxiety Disorders

People with an anxiety disorder find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety can start to dominate and negatively impact their daily life.

Anxiety can be related to a specific type of event or situation, an example of this is agoraphobia where people experience anxiety when outside, or social phobia where people can find talking to others or being in social situations very stressful and difficult.

Alternatively anxiety can be experienced as a constant feeling of unease, tension and worry which occurs all the time regardless of the situation. This sort of anxiety is called generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

Anxiety Symptoms

Psychological symptoms of anxiety include:

- restlessness and impatience
- a sense of dread
- feeling constantly "on edge"
- difficulty concentrating or being easily distracted
- irritability

Physical symptoms of anxiety include:

- dizziness, headaches or nausea
- drowsiness and tiredness
- pins and needles
- irregular heartbeat (palpitations)
- muscle aches and tension
- dry mouth and shortness of breath
- excessive sweating and thirst
- stomach ache and/or diarrhoea
- frequent urinating
- painful or missed periods
- difficulty falling or staying asleep (insomnia)

A combination of these symptoms may cause withdrawal from family and friends to avoid feelings of worry and dread. Going to work can also be difficult and stressful resulting in time off sick.

How is anxiety treated?

Several different treatments are available to ease the symptoms of anxiety. These include psychological therapy and medication.

The first step will be to see your GP who will be able to advise you on the different options available.

Psychological treatment is often the first course of treatment in the form of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). It is known that psychological treatments can be really helpful for anxiety and can have lasting positive effects.

There are a range of medication options which can help people with GAD, usually alongside psychological therapy. Depending on the symptoms, medicine to treat physical symptoms may also be required.

If a selection of treatments have been tried but there are still significant symptoms of GAD a referral may be made to a mental health specialist. This will usually be to a community mental health team. A member of the mental health team will carry out an assessment in order to devise a treatment plan.

Some people turn to alcohol or illegal drugs to manage their anxiety, but this often makes things worse. If this is the case then you might need some additional help from local drug and alcohol services.

Self help

There are things you can do yourself which can help to ease the symptoms of anxiety. Here are some examples:

Exercise - particularly aerobic exercise, can help combat stress and release tension. It also encourages your brain to release the chemical serotonin, which can improve your mood.

- Relaxation - learn how to relax, breathing exercises or activities like yoga or pilates can help.
- Support groups – these often provide useful advice about how to effectively manage anxiety. They are also a good way to meet other people with similar experiences.

More information:

No Panic - a voluntary charity for people who suffer from panic attacks and anxiety disorders. T: 0800 138 8889 from 10.00 am - 10.00 pm, everyday or visit: www.nopanic.org.uk

Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust - the principal provider of mental health and learning disability services in Cornwall: www.cornwallfoundationtrust.nhs.uk

BeMe - providers of psychological therapies throughout Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly: search **BeMe Cornwall**

The Royal College of Psychiatrists - the professional and educational body for psychiatrists in the United Kingdom visit: www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Rethink Mental Illness - a charity which helps people affected by mental illness. T: 0845 456 0455 Monday to Friday, between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm or visit: www.rethink.org

Mind - advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem T: 0845 766 0163 Monday to Friday, between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm or visit: www.mind.org.uk

NICE - produce best practice guidance visit: www.nice.org.uk for more information.

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