

Anxiety information sheet

Anxiety is the most common of all the mental health disorders. 264 million people worldwide were estimated to be living with anxiety (World Health Organization).

What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a state of unease which can take on varying degrees of severity. It may be characterised by feelings of fear, worry, panic or dread. Most of us have times in our lives when we feel a little anxious, and where this can be seen as normal and appropriate – for example, experiencing nervousness before an exam or job interview, or being slightly on edge in unfamiliar surroundings. Usually, this type of anxiety serves its purpose (keeping us alert and primed for action) and then dissipates when the situation is over, or when we adjust. Sometimes, though, anxiety sticks around or seems to arise for no particular reason.

Anxiety can come in different forms:

- **Phobias** refer to acute anxiety that is experienced in relation to certain things or situations
- **Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)** is a more pervasive form of anxiety experienced in a wider range of circumstances
- **Health anxiety** is typified by excessive worry about one's health, or the health of others
- **Social anxiety** is the intense fear of mixing with or speaking to others
- **Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)** is a particular type of anxiety often marked by a need to check things or perform 'rituals' (either physically or mentally) in order to manage anxiety and feel safe.



Anxiety can impact people in a number of ways:

- As it plays out within the body (often through feeling tense and 'on edge'), those suffering from anxiety may experience a range of physical symptoms or have difficulty sleeping.
- Sufferers might also have panic attacks – short but intense bursts of anxiety where they may struggle to breathe and feel as if they're 'going crazy' or about to die.
- Anxiety can affect a person's mind, consuming much 'mental space', thus affecting concentration, focus and memory.
- People can feel very alone and isolated when they suffer from anxiety, as if they're 'abnormal' and everyone else is coping better.

Anxiety can affect a person's whole sense of wellbeing, as well as their working life and relationships.

Anxiety can have a range of causes. Sometimes factors in a person's early years (adverse childhood events such as loss, trauma or abuse) make anxiety more likely later in life. Anxiety is often triggered by some kind of stress at work or in one's personal life. Living with uncertainty or experiencing unforeseen challenges can provoke anxiety. Hence, it's unsurprising that more people are reporting experiencing anxiety during the coronavirus pandemic.

What are the common symptoms for Anxiety?

- **Physical** symptoms of anxiety may include, difficulty breathing (or breathing harder or faster), dizziness and light-headedness, sweating or hot-flushes, restlessness, churning stomach, dry mouth, needing the toilet more often, nausea, and changes to heartbeat. Although these symptoms can feel unpleasant or frightening, they usually represent our bodies reacting to a perceived threat by going into 'fight, flight or freeze' mode.
- **Psychological** symptoms of anxiety may include, feeling tense and unable to relax, fearing the worst, worrying that other people can notice your anxiety and may be judging it, seeking reassurance, and feeling disconnected from your body and/or reality (both forms of dissociation). Again, these symptoms tend to indicate that our minds are either geared up to respond to a threatening or unfamiliar situation or that they are shutting down due to feeling overwhelmed.

Self-health tips for those experiencing Anxiety

- **Talk to someone you trust.** Our fears and worries can easily become distorted and amplified when we hold them on our own. Finding someone you feel safe to talk to about your anxiety may help to quieten it. This could be a friend or family member or, alternatively, a professional outside your day-to-day life such as your doctor or a therapist.
- **Find ways of managing your worries.** Accepting your worries and trying to work with them may be more realistic, and ultimately more helpful, than trying to get rid of them completely.
 - Writing your worries down may be one way of approaching this. This can make them seem less overwhelming - particularly if you do this before bed at the end of the day.

- Scheduling a set time to worry as opposed to letting it seep into your day is another approach.
- A good tactic when addressing your worries is differentiating between what is within your control and what isn't.
- **Focus on your breathing.** Attending to the rhythm of your breath is a quick and effective way of halting feelings of panic and preventing them from spiralling. Regulating your breathing and trying to make your 'out' breath longer than your 'in' breath will soothe your system and bring you back into contact with your body.
- **Ground yourself in the present.** Anxiety tends to see us either ruminating about the past or worrying about the future. Try looking around the room and finding five things that are the same colour or that begin with the same letter. This will re-engage the pre-frontal cortex, the more rational part of the brain, which tends to go 'offline' when we're highly anxious or stressed.
- **Look after your physical health.** Trying to maintain healthy sleeping, exercise and sleeping patterns will go a long way in terms of alleviating anxiety.
 - A good night's sleep helps us to feel rested and ready to face the day's challenges and learning more about [sleep hygiene](#) may help if this currently feels a struggle for you.
 - Keeping your blood sugar steady with regular nutritious meals and snacks will also prevent the dips and spikes in energy that can exacerbate anxiety.
 - A little exercise will also contribute to your overall wellbeing, especially if taken outdoors, where connecting with nature or the outside world may help to take you away from your worries for a while.

- Watch your consumption of alcohol because, whilst this may temporarily ease your worries, it will rarely resolve them and may ultimately leave you feeling more anxious. A high intake of caffeine or sugary drinks can have a similar effect.
- **Consider complementary and alternative therapies.** Many people find practices such as aromatherapy, reflexology, massage, yoga and meditation help with their anxiety. It may take a while to experiment and find what works for you but many of these practices promote relaxation and tend to aspects of both the body and the mind that can be activated by anxiety.
- **Self-help and learning.** There are many books, apps and online articles out there that can help in terms of self-education about anxiety. It can be both empowering and normalising to come to understand your symptoms better and learn how to address them – either on your own or with the support of a mental health professional or peer support group.

Professional resources for Anxiety

- MIND www.mind.org.uk is the UK's main mental health charity. This link provides information on symptoms and treatment options regarding anxiety and other common mental health issues.
- NHS www.nhs.uk main website features information on General Anxiety Disorder.
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk provides a range of leaflets on anxiety, panic and phobias, which can be accessed in different languages.

Further useful information for those experiencing Anxiety

- Anxiety UK www.anxietyuk.org.uk – Anxiety UK runs a helpline. The website offers free information and resources, whilst membership (which is open to those outside the UK) offers access to reduced cost therapies and access to Headspace meditation app.
- McDonagh, B. (2015). *Dare: The new way to end anxiety and stop panic attacks.* BMD Publishing. This book invites readers to face their anxiety and literally 'dare' it to do its worst as opposed to feeding into it or trying to ignore it. The book comes with free access to an app and audiobook.
- No Panic www.nopanic.org.uk – UK based charity supporting those who experience panic attacks and other anxiety related disorders. No Panic runs a helpline, and their website features free information and resources.
- NHS Apps Library www.nhs.uk – a range of NHS assessed apps and digital tools that may help address anxiety and other mental health issues.

FD Consultants

Individual support

At FD Consultants we can help individuals recover from anxiety. We are a network of accredited therapists. We specialise in stress, anxiety, depression, burnout and trauma care.

Organisational support

For organisations looking for employee psychological support, FD Consultants are the well-being service who will best deliver a reliable, quick, and bespoke support system in the workplace. FD Consultant's team of accredited specialists will offer ongoing support to help manage stress, prevent burnout and provide specialist trauma care where required, enabling your staff with the tools to cope, and recover more quickly.