

Infosheet on Anxiety

Last update 20 March 2020

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the world, with 1 in 13 people suffering from anxiety worldwide (WHO). This infosheet provides information on symptoms of anxiety, tips on managing anxiety, and signposts to further support.

*If you are feeling particularly worried about the Corona Virus, please check out our blogs on the subject: "[Managing Scary Thoughts](#)" and "[So Now We Are Isolated](#)" by Graham Fawcett

Anxiety is intense and persistent worry or fear that is out of proportion to a situation, leaving an individual feeling overwhelmed and unable to control worrying. Stressful circumstances can increase anxiety, but people with an anxiety disorder will experience dread of everyday situations over a long period of time (at least 6 months). The most common type of anxiety is called "Generalized Anxiety Disorder" (GAD), and people with GAD may catastrophize or anticipate disaster and be overly concerned about everyday issues such as: money, health, family, and work.

Anxiety comes in many shapes and sizes. The most common forms are: [General Anxiety Disorder](#), [Panic Disorder](#) (panic attacks), [Specific Phobias](#) (i.e. spiders, tight spaces), [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder](#), [PTSD](#), and [Social Anxiety](#).

Common anxiety signs and symptoms include (Mayo Clinic)

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

Risk factors for anxiety include

- Personal or family history of anxiety
- Ongoing or historic traumatic events, especially if they are unprocessed
- Cumulative stress build-up such as: a chronic health condition, workplace stress, financial worries, abusive relationships
- Having other mental health disorders. Depression is common partner to anxiety
- Certain personality traits. Some people are more prone to experience anxiety due to personality characteristics including perfectionism or need for orderliness.
- Alcohol and drugs can cause or worsen anxiety

Anxiety can be made worse if you are:

- Working in a fractured team with unhealthy workplace relationships
- Experiencing rapid and unexpected change
- Socially isolated
- Unwilling to seek support when needed
- Exposed to any new fear-inducing situation that overwhelms your perceived ability to cope

What helps?

Mark Twain once said, "Some of the worst things in my life never even happened"

Acknowledge and accept anxious thoughts.

- Avoiding or fighting them gives anxiety more strength.
- Catch the anxious thought and welcome it.
- Remember that thoughts are not facts. Ask yourself if the thought is helpful or unhelpful. Thank yourself for the thought and gently let the unhelpful thoughts continue by.
- Take a nice long breath and bring your full attention to that breath. Try it again.
- Remember that feelings will pass as they have before.
- Gently shift your attention towards what's next or try one of the activities below.

ThriveWorldwide

It can be difficult to get out of your head and rationalize your anxiety. If this is the case, there's no harm in positive distraction! Try one of the following engaging activities:

- A rigorous workout or group sport
- Cooking a nice meal with friends
- Reading a captivating book or watching a movie
- Get outside and pay attention to what's happening out there. Can you hear birds? Feel wind? Research is definitive, "green space and blue space" have a significant impact on psychological recovery.
- Anything that gives you control and immediate satisfaction: gardening, cleaning, easy work tasks.

Consider the utility of your anxiety. Many of you may live and work in insecure parts of the world, or areas of high crime rates. Staying vigilant is the responsible thing to do. However, our advice is to limit the amount of time spent under high stress or worry. We know that the longer you spend in fear/anxiety the more reinforced it becomes. In the brain and body, anxiety becomes the 'most travelled route'; the default response to life in general, and it becomes more difficult to get back to baseline.

Stop smoking, cut back on alcohol and caffeine intake

Do not discontinue prescribed medication while deployed abroad

Experiment with relaxation techniques. This might be listening to a mindfulness app such as [Headspace](#) or [Calm](#). Or it may look like prayer, meditation, or yoga.

Get some quick wins by setting some small and achievable goals

Practice self-compassion and kindness. Self-critical thoughts cause more distress. Consider reducing your personal expectations if you are going through a time of anxiety.

Speak to a doctor or a mental health professional if

- Your worrying is impacting your work, relationships or other parts of your daily life
- You are escaping anxiety with drugs or alcohol
- If you are feeling depressed or thinking about suicide. If you have strong feelings of hurting yourself or someone else seek help immediately.

Consider the possibility that your anxiety may not go away on its own; and remember that it's easier to treat if you get help early. Treatments for anxiety are very effective. They may include: counselling, medication, applied relaxation, among others. Several modalities are effective for anxiety with the most common being [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy](#) (CBT) and [Acceptance and Commitment Therapy](#) (ACT).

Thrive's Counselling Services

If you're experiencing stress, burnout, depression or other emotional issues, and you'd like to speak with one of our qualified counsellors, then get in touch. You can email info@thrive-worldwide.org to book an online or face-to-face appointment with one of our counsellors. We offer appointments in Arabic, English, French, Kiswahili and Spanish.



Additional Resources

Self-help books

[Be Calm](#). Jill Weber (2019)

[Dare: The new way to end anxiety and stop panic attacks](#). Barry McDonagh (2015)

[Overcoming Anxiety](#). Helen Kennerley (2014)

Self-assessment and therapies

[Self-assessment for anxiety](#). Use this to get a sense of your anxiety level and determine whether you may need additional support. It is not a diagnosis.

[Self-help therapies](#) by the NHS is a great place to start if you'd like to learn more about anxiety and manage mild anxiety.

Useful websites:

[Anxiety UK](#)

[National Health Service \(UK\)](#)

[Mind.org](#)

[Osmosis video on Generalized Anxiety](#)