

INFORMATION ABOUT ANXIETY

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal human feeling linked to a sensation felt when faced with difficult situations. Most people think anxiety is always a negative and troublesome experience (or feeling) but it can be a positive experience and increase our performance and awareness.

What does it feel like?

The feeling is generally one of fear and worry about what might happen in a future situation. Anxiety produces both physical and psychological symptoms, e.g.:

Psychological (mind)	Physical (body)
Worrying all the time.	Irregular heartbeat/palpitations.
Difficulty concentrating.	Sweating.
Feeling irritable.	Muscle tension and pain.
Tiredness.	Heavy breathing/inability to catch breath
Poor sleep pattern.	Light-headedness. Dizziness. Faintness.
Morbid thoughts.	Indigestion.
Anger/Aggression.	Diarrhoea/need to pass urine.

What causes anxiety?

There are 2 elements in anxiety:

1. Internal factors/our constitution or health.
2. External factors/our environment.
 - Internal/constitution/health: you may have a genetic vulnerability to anxiety. Some people are born worriers or have grown up with that type of individual.
 - External/environment: this may lead you to experience anxiety at a particular time or place.

The mixture of these two elements results in the development of symptoms.

When might you experience anxiety?

The most common catalysts for anxiety are life experiences such as bereavements, illnesses, relationship breakdowns or stress. However other events such as vehicle accidents, physical assaults and subsequent hospitalisation with injuries are also major contributors to experiencing anxiety. The way in which the subconscious mind adjusts and deals with these experiences can be an indicator of how your anxiety will manifest itself.

What can be done to help?

Firstly, understanding what is happening and how your body responds to stress is vital along with recognising the physical and psychological experiences. It is important that you understand you can have control over the situation.

Most anxiety sufferers have had an experience which artificially raises their 'benchmark' anxiety level. It should then return to normal, but after a prolonged or repeated anxiety experience it might not and may become re-set at a higher than normal level.

An anxiety treatment can address this in order to regain a normal resting anxiety level. You can learn how to use some self help methods at this point:

- Consider reducing any excessive alcohol or caffeine intake.
- Gently increase exercise e.g. regular walking in fresh air.
- Adopt a healthy sleeping pattern.
- Practice relaxation techniques.
- Seek counselling to assist you.

Medication may be prescribed by your GP and is helpful in controlling some of the symptoms but does not necessarily resolve the problem causing the symptoms.

What is the difference between Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Panic Attacks and Phobias?

Generalised anxiety disorder is a condition where people feel very anxious and worried for no obvious reason. You may have physical symptoms (headache, chest pain) or psychological symptoms (tiredness, swinging emotions). It may be due to environmental stress or internal factors.

Obsessive compulsive disorder develops as a control mechanism for your anxiety as your mind creates anxious scenarios. It develops as a result of anxiety and is purely a symptom that can give you a feeling of control back again but must not be allowed to dominate your anxiety as you should explore other ways of coping.

Panic attacks depend on many factors including environment, age and biological make-up. There is a sudden unexplained surge of anxiety, often accompanied by physical symptoms (chest pain, dizziness, shortness of breath). It usually leads to a person having to 'get out' of the situation they are in. Be careful that this does not lead to an avoidance of situations and a withdrawal from society. Panic attacks can be frightening but develop as a way of coping with impending danger. You can eliminate panic attacks by identifying the underlying cause and dealing with it.

Phobias are strong fears of a specific object or situation. As many as half the population have phobias, e.g. spiders, open spaces, snakes, closed spaces etc. *Social phobia* is where people are frightened of being under the scrutiny of others, such as public speaking (with all eyes and ears upon you) or following an injury when other people may have an increased curiosity to look or stare).