

Anxiety and How to Help

Anxiety can often be a misunderstood term as it is natural for all of us to feel anxiety at some point in our lives. To be anxious about an exam, presentation or worry about a loved one is a natural part of our body's coping mechanism and as such can provide a useful purpose – preparing us for the worst and making us aware of potential dangers or worries.

Anxiety can manifest itself in the form of physical symptoms such as nausea, shortness of breath or sleep loss. Emotionally it can make us very unhappy, teary or even angry and irritable.

Sustained feelings of this kind, however, could be an indication of an anxiety disorder which can have a profound and detrimental effect on your life. Anxiety disorders take on a number of forms and the symptoms can manifest themselves on a wide range of ways from panic attacks to insomnia or depression. Using a number of different techniques, some of the symptoms of anxiety can be targeted and quelled.

Know Yourself – Examine your life and habits

Try to pick out the areas which contribute greatly to your stress levels or look at the type of activities which make you feel anxious. Learn to recognise these areas in your life and the feelings associated with them when they arise.

If you know the signs you are more likely to be able to prepare yourself for them and monitor your behaviour accordingly.

Learn to recognise when you are entering high stress or feel very anxious and take steps to stop the feelings before they become unable to manage. You can do this by removing yourself from the situation or by using relaxation techniques like the ones below.

Don't Add to Your Load – Know your limits

Everyone has a breaking point and everyone reaches theirs at a different time. It is not a sign of weakness or laziness to admit that you are over worked, stressed or feeling unhappy. Often many small things building up can affect you just as badly as one large problem.

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Pushing yourself to reach your goals or support others can be positive, but burning out or making yourself ill is not. Only you know your breaking point and when you feel you are approaching it – make allowances for that in your life. If someone asks you to do something and you don't feel like you can take it on – just say no. Don't let others walk all over you or take advantage.

Relaxation

One of the best ways to counter anxiety is to reduce your anxiety levels. By physically relaxing your body, in this way, you will find that your emotional stress levels also reduce. This can be done through relaxing your body, muscles and mind.

Try tensing and relaxing each of your limbs in turn, beginning with a clenched fist, holding it tight for a few seconds, then slowly relaxing it. Do this with your arms, face, legs etc and gradually relax each in turn. Concentrate on each body part and focus on what you are doing. This will help you clear your mind of stresses and worries.

Breathing

Monitoring your breathing is another effective means of calming yourself when you feel stressed or anxious. Practically, this can also help counter panic attacks, asthma or hyperventilation.

If you feel yourself becoming stressed take some slow, measured breaths; filling your lungs. Put your hands on your stomach area and feel your diaphragm expand, hold your breath for a few seconds then slowly let the air out of your lungs, concentrating on keeping your breathing regular.

Do this for several minutes until you feel your body becoming less tense and more relaxed.

Exercise

Gentle exercise is a great way to work out physical tensions. Going to the gym, taking a walk or run, doing yoga or a team activity can be a great way to blow off some steam and to shift your focus from your day-to-day stresses.

Physical exercise also releases endorphins in your body, making you feel more happy and relaxed. After exercise, you will find it easier to get a good night's sleep, which in turn helps with your coping mechanisms.

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Caffeine and Alcohol

It may sound strange but what you consume can have a great effect on your body's stress levels. Food and drinks that increase your heart rate or disrupt your sleep can increase your feelings of anxiety.

Try to avoid drinks with caffeine in such as tea, coffee and certain soft drinks. Alcohol and nicotine was also worsening your anxiety levels – alcohol acts as a depressant. When your stress levels are high – you are bound to feel more anxious.

Professional Help

If you feel that your problems are getting out of control and not something you can handle by yourself, there are a range of professional bodies which can offer help and support. Your GP will be able to offer you support and advice on how to proceed from counselling to medication or holistic and cognitive therapies.

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