

Self Help Tips for Anxiety

Facing up to anxiety and how it makes you feel can be the first step in breaking the cycle of fear. Developing strategies to prevent and cope with the symptoms will allow you to relax, take control and lead a fuller life.

Spot the signs | Symptoms of anxiety include rapid heartbeat or breathing, weak or tense muscles, sweating, a churning stomach, dizziness, a dry mouth, feeling worried and difficulty concentrating. It can be useful to note when you are having symptoms to help spot any patterns or situations that are creating the anxiety. Then you can plan how to cope with similar situations in future.

Exercise | Exercise helps prevent and treats anxiety by reducing levels of stress hormones and allowing muscles to relax. Doing something you enjoy is a good idea, whether cycling, team sports or dancing round the kitchen. If it's fun you are more likely to want to keep doing it.

Actively relax | If you can build the time into your day to regularly practise relaxation it can really help. Active Relaxation includes techniques like deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, yoga or tai chi. It is also good to take time to un-wind, for example, listening to music, having a bath or reading a book.

Eat healthily | A healthy diet including whole grains, oily fish, and lots of fruit and vegetables provides your body with the nutrients it needs to produce feel-good chemicals. Foods to avoid include processed food, sugar, caffeine and alcohol which can all increase anxiety levels.

Talk to friends or family | Opening up and discussing your anxiety with others can help relieve the feelings. You might have close family or friends who have been through a similar experience and can understand and offer you support. It can also give you someone to contact in difficult situations when you are starting to feel anxious, which can prevent the feelings getting worse.

Face your fears | There can be a natural tendency to avoid situations that make us feel anxious, but avoidance can make things worse. Often the reality of a situation won't be as bad as you expect and facing your fears will give you confidence to face similar situations in future.

Talking therapies | Counselling or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be very effective for people with anxiety. They can help you understand your feelings, deal with the causes and find coping strategies.

Breathing exercises | Anxiety can lead to faster breathing which can make you feel dizzy or faint. Try to notice how fast you're breathing and if necessary slow the rate down by: breathing deeply into your abdomen; then breathing out slowly – making your out breath longer than the in breath. Repeat for at least 3 minutes. It's a good idea to practise this while feeling calm, so it'll be easier to remember when you need it.

Distraction | If feelings of anxiety seem overwhelming then you could try taking some time out by walking round the block, making a cup of tea or having a bath. If you're beginning to feel panicky, then focussing on something outside of yourself can help by distracting you. Try looking around and studying something in detail, anything will do, whether it's a flower, registration numbers or the sorts of shoes people are wearing.

Create a coping card | When you're feeling very anxious it can be hard to remember coping strategies. You could try making a small list of things that might help (e.g. phone mum, do breathing exercise) on a piece of card you can keep with you in a bag or wallet.

If your anxiety doesn't seem to be getting any better, or feels as if its taking over your life, it is important to make an appointment with your G.P. They are used to seeing people with your difficulties and will be able to conduct a thorough assessment and explain the treatment options available to you.