

AWARE

**OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.**

LET'S TALK ABOUT

**HELPING
YOU WITH
ANXIETY**

Anxiety and stress are normal feelings. When doing certain things, such as walking into a crowded room, going to an important meeting, or crossing a busy road, you may experience feelings of stress or anxiety.

Some anxiety can be good as it helps us focus and be alert for danger. However, when there is no reason for anxiety, or it becomes long-lasting or intense, it can start to interfere with daily life and may develop into an anxiety disorder.

AWARE-NI.ORG



Are You At Risk?

Ask yourself:

-  Do you overthink or worry about future events?
-  Did you go through a difficult childhood?
-  Did your parents have high expectations, or were they over-critical of you?
-  Are you very wary or over-sensitive to situations?



Look Out for the Signs

Anxiety can affect you in various ways, but the symptoms can usually be grouped under four headings.



1. Thoughts

You may think things such as 'something bad is going to happen' or 'I won't be able to cope' or 'I feel bad, so it must be bad'.



2. Feelings

Anxious, fearful, worried, nervous, restless, agitated etc.



3. Behaviour

Avoiding certain people, places, situations, or not going out; only going places at certain times or with someone else; increased use of drugs and alcohol.



4. Physical Symptoms

Headaches, muscle or chest pain, sweating, tingling, numbness, shaking, dizziness, rapid or shallow breathing, rapid heartbeat, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea etc.



REMEMBER

People experience anxiety in different ways, and not everyone will experience the same symptoms.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER

This is when you have overwhelming feelings of anxiety or worry more often than not for 6 months or more. The worry is usually unfounded or exaggerated about things that may go wrong and feeling unable to cope when they do.

PANIC DISORDER

This is when you suffer from panic attacks. They come on quickly, and symptoms are acute, especially hyperventilation (rapid breathing), rapid heartbeat and/or chest pain. As the symptoms are similar to a heart attack, it can cause fear that you are dying, but the attack usually eases within a few minutes.

PHOBIC DISORDERS

You may have agoraphobia (avoidance of certain situations or places), a specific phobia (an exaggerated or unfounded fear of certain things such as spiders, flying, or being closed in), or social phobia (fear of any situation where public scrutiny may be possible).

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) & ACUTE STRESS DISORDER

After experiencing, witnessing or hearing about a distressing or disastrous event, you may suffer from one of these disorders. Acute Stress Disorder gets better within a month, whereas PTSD lasts much longer.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

With OCD, you have obsessive thoughts (most of which are about fear of harm or contamination), and to reduce the anxiety caused by these, you carry out compulsive behaviours like excessive cleaning, handwashing, or checking behaviours.

REMEMBER

Many symptoms are common to all disorders, and people with anxiety may not fit neatly into one particular type.

Depression and anxiety often go hand in hand. When you are depressed, you usually worry about the future and have a mixture of anxiety and depression. If you have been experiencing high levels of anxiety over a long period, it may lead to depression.



What Helps for Anxiety?

It's important to see your GP if you think you are experiencing anxiety, as they can advise on an appropriate course of treatment and rule out other causes, such as some medical conditions or side effects of certain prescription/non-prescription drugs.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

CBT is a talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave. CBT has been shown to be effective for anxiety disorders in both the short term and long term.



MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is another proven method for helping anxiety. It helps you develop skills and techniques to cope with the daily challenges a busy life can bring, such as stress and anxiety.



MEDICATION

Your GP may prescribe a short course of anti-anxiety medication or tranquilisers. These can help you to cope with symptoms of anxiety until more effective treatment is in place. Some modern antidepressants are also very effective for certain types of anxiety or when depression is also present.

OTHER SELF-HELP METHODS

- **Avoid alcohol or keep it to a safe limit.**
- **Maintain a regular sleep routine.**
- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet.**
- **Reduce caffeine intake.**
- **Talk about it with someone you trust.**
- **Challenge your thinking - is it fact or fiction?**

The 5 most evidence-based steps to improving your mental health are:



1. Be Active

Our bodies release feel-good hormones when we're active that can also reduce anxiety and stress, and help us sleep better.



2. Take Notice

Savour the moment, be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.



3. Give

Do something nice for a loved one or stranger. Smile, volunteer your time, or consider joining a community group.



4. Connect

With the people around you - family, friends or neighbours. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.



5. Keep Learning

Do not be afraid to try something new. Rediscover an old hobby or interest, or simply set a challenge you will enjoy.



Do One Thing:

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed when taking steps to help yourself. But remember to focus on doing just one thing at a time. It will help you reach the goals you set and give you a real sense of achievement.

Who to Contact for Support

Lifeline
0808 808 8000

Lifeline

A telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress. It is available 24/7 and free to call.

They can give you immediate support, offer face-to-face appointments, or give you information about other services in your area. **Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.**

You could also:

- See your GP or call the out-of-hours GP service
- Go to the A&E department
- Call emergency services on 999
- Call Samaritans on their freephone helpline 116 123 - a confidential listening service for those in distress

AWARE NI

You can read our guides for more information on support with anxiety and looking after your mental health.

Contact us by emailing info@aware-ni.org and visit our website at aware-ni.org

AWARE NI also have FREE mental health support groups for anyone aged 18 or over. You can find your nearest one by searching: aware-ni.org/support-groups/

