

Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety refers to conditions such as apprehension, fear, worry, pervading uncertainty, insecurity or foreboding. It can be mild or average, or severe and seriously negatively affect one's quality of life, including sleep and normal functioning. Life's uncertainties periodically throw up periods of anxiety.

Exams, public speaking, job interviews and other challenging situations cause some degree of anxiety in most people. We deal with the situation as best we can and get on with our lives. But for some people, anxiety is out of proportion with events, or is present most of the time. Life is adversely affected. Challenges are avoided, social relationships suffer and physical illness may occur.

Types of anxiety include: GAD (generalised anxiety disorder), Agoraphobia, Panic, Phobia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Separation Anxiety and Social Anxiety.

GAD (Generalised Anxiety Disorder)

GAD sufferers are in a constant state of anxiety about life in general. GAD is present in the background all or most of the time. The person worries about family, money, home, school, work, the car, travelling or even meeting up with friends. They instinctively expect the worse from life. Things will turn out wrong because that is how the world is. Depression follows, compounding the situation. The person overthinks and finds it difficult to 'let go' of disturbing or negative thoughts.

Physical symptoms associated with GAD include: shallow breathing, breathlessness, heart problems, dizziness, bladder or stomach problems, perspiration and sleep difficulties. The person may withdraw socially or have difficulty contributing positively to relationships.

Managing Anxiety

Generalised Anxiety Disorder

Persons with GAD will benefit from counselling and self-help practices. Counselling will help them understand their condition and talk through their fears. Often, distorted or false beliefs lie behind anxiety conditions. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is especially effective, as it helps clients to recognise faulty beliefs, and change them for more realistic ones.

Also beneficial is to learn meditation and other calming techniques, so you can manage the anxiety when it occurs. MiCBT (Mindfulness-integrated-Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) is ideal for GAD, as it works on thoughts, behaviours and emotions, all of which are affected. We can help you with this.

Cognitive Strategies - Thinking

1. Identify the cause of your anxiety: is it a particular trigger or a pervading condition (GAD)? Knowing the cause and circumstances of your anxiety gives you a head start in fixing it.
2. Once you know what is behind your anxiety, consider each detail of the situation. Analyse it carefully. You are a scientist, carrying out an important investigation. Be as objective as possible.
3. Identify where the anxiety emerges. Look for the specific event or action that produces it. As well as the trigger itself, notice what is happening to you at the time, especially in your body.
4. Consider whether you are responding realistically. Are you catastrophising (responding out of proportion with the event)? If so, you will have inaccurate and exaggerated thoughts. What would be a more realistic appraisal of the situation? What would be more accurate thoughts? Write them down and read them often. Soon, you will be less anxious and more relaxed about that type of event.

Physical Strategies - Doing

1. **Breathing:** Notice what happens in your body when you're anxious. Do you tense up? Breathe more rapidly or shallowly? Practice slow, rhythmical breathing. Slowly count your breaths, such as 'One-Two-Three' for each in-breath and each out-breath. Do this both when you are in a state of anxiety and when you are not. Practicing ahead of time will give you the edge for when you need it. Your body will get used to the new pattern of breathing and fall into it more readily when 'under threat.'

2. **Relaxation:** Get into the habit of noticing whether or not your body is relaxed. Anxious people tend to hold tension in the body, which makes them feel worse. Practice consciously relaxing your limbs and body parts often, both when you are anxious and when you are not.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is the practice of first tensing and then relaxing muscle groups throughout the body. It gives the body a good relaxing 'work over' and is very beneficial for sufferers of anxiety and other forms of stress. We can teach you how to do this. You can learn it as part of a Mindfulness course.

3. **Meditation:** There are many forms of meditation that can relieve the symptoms of anxiety. You may need the help of a trained practitioner to learn them. But in the meantime, sitting relaxed, eyes gently closed, focusing on the breath going in and out will help you feel better.

4. **Exercise:** Ensure you exercise regularly, as this allows the body to release built up tensions and stress. Body movement is good for you both mentally and physically. It helps keep you 'grounded,' feeling safe and solid. The blood circulation associated with exercise makes you feel alive and positive. Accomplishing physical goals, such as completing a good workout or a long walk, makes you feel confident and capable, reducing the presence of insecure feelings that can lead to anxiety.

5. **Diet and sleep:** Ensure to eat a balanced diet. Monitor your intake of coffee and alcohol. They may ease your anxiety in the short term, but if taken to excess, will leave you feeling worse. Make sure you get enough hours sleep every night. Overtiredness can cause or contribute to anxiety feelings.

6. **Consider MiCBT – Mindfulness-integrated-Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.** This teaches you very useful skills to manage anxiety and maintain your wellbeing. Contact us for details.

Dr Pauline Enright Mobile: 0409 191 342
Email: pauline@radiancehobart.com.au

PO Box 907, Sandy Bay, TAS 7006
Website: www.radiancehobart.com.au
