

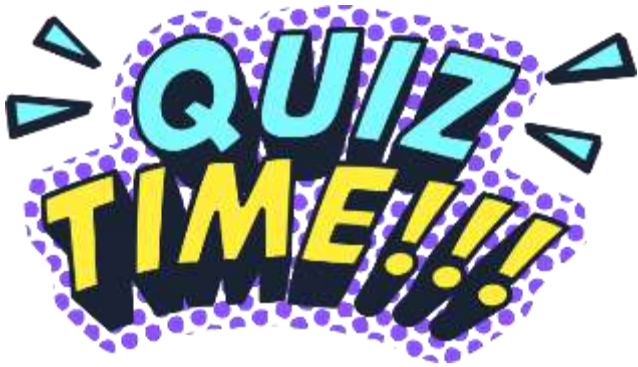


Understanding Anxiety



AGENDA

- Understanding anxiety
- Causes & triggers
- Signs & symptoms
- The impact of anxiety
- Strategies for managing anxiety
- Creating a supportive work environment



1. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorders globally.
True or false?
2. What percentage of the global population have an anxiety disorder?
A) 0.5% B) 2.5% C) 4%
3. Around six in ten of those with anxiety, also have depression.
True or false?

Definition of anxiety



Definition of anxiety

*Anxiety is a **natural response to stress or a perceived threat**, characterised by **feelings of uneasiness, apprehension, or worry**. It involves a range of **physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms**, such as increased heart rate, restlessness, and intrusive thoughts.*



Differentiation between normal stress & clinical anxiety



Normal stress

- Occurs in response to everyday challenges and pressures.
- Typically, temporary and manageable.
- Does not significantly impair daily functioning.



Clinical anxiety

- Extends beyond normal stress levels.
- Persistent and disproportionate to the situation.
- Interferes with daily life, work, and relationships.
- May be accompanied by physical symptoms and excessive worry.

The prevalence

- Global impact
- Leading cause of disability
- Negative impact on the workplace (productivity, absenteeism, overall wellbeing)



Anxiety disorders prevalence, 2019

Estimated share of people with anxiety disorders, whether or not they are diagnosed, based on representative surveys, medical data and statistical modelling.

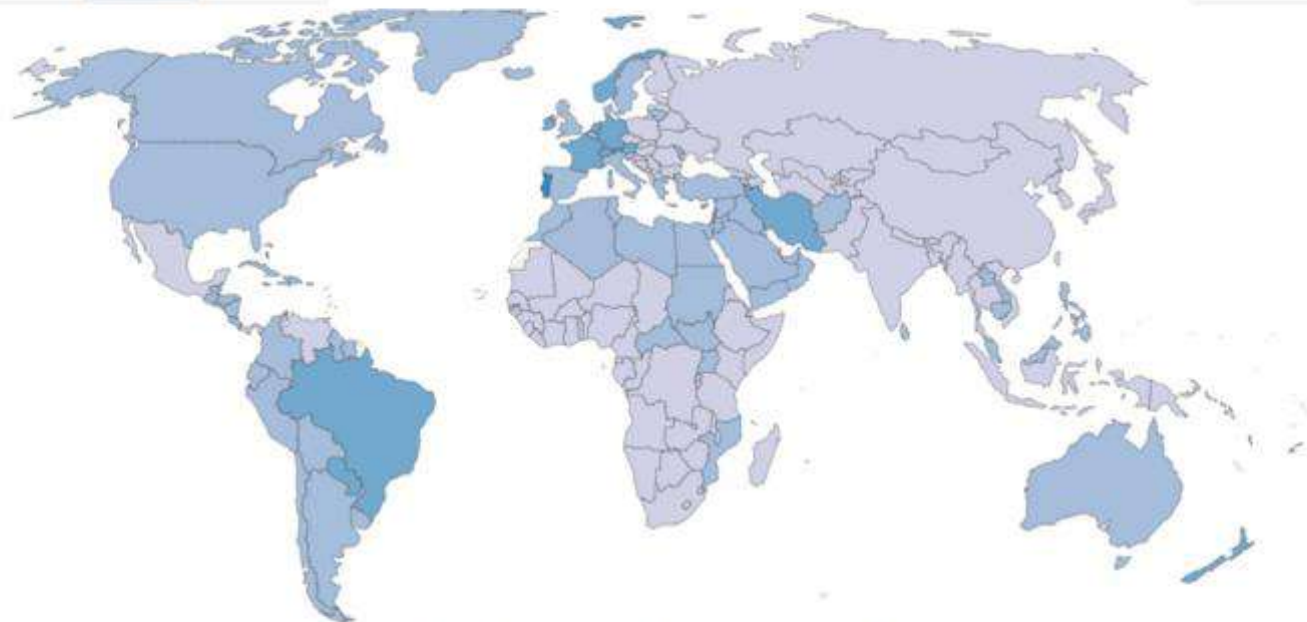
Our World
in Data

Table

Map

Chart

World



► Play time-lapse

1990

2019

Data source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease (2019) - [Learn more about this data](#)

Note: To allow for comparisons between countries and over time, this metric is age-standardized.

OurWorldInData.org/mental-health | CC BY



Causes & triggers



Biological factors

- Genetic predisposition
- Brain chemistry
- Neurological factors





Environmental factors

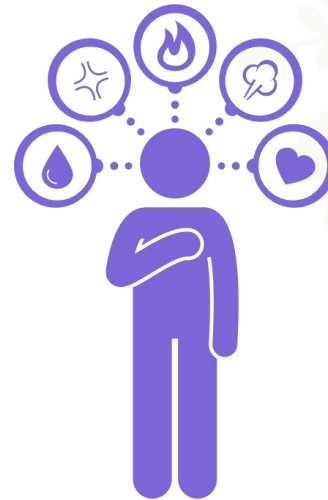


- Upbringing
- Early life experiences
- Trauma
- Exposure to chronic stressors
- Social environment
- Cultural factors
- Life transitions



Psychological factors

- Cognitive processes
- Coping mechanisms
- Personality traits
- Attention bias
- Resilience
- Interpersonal relationships
- Self-esteem





CATASTROPHIZING

WHEN YOU EXPECT THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO TO HAPPEN TO YOU



MIND READING

WHEN YOU ASSUME YOU KNOW WHAT OTHERS ARE THINKING OR FEELING



NEGATIVE FOCUS

WHEN YOU IGNORE THE POSITIVE ASPECTS & ONLY SEE THE NEGATIVE ONES



CONTROL FALLACY

WHEN YOU ASSUME YOU CAN CONTROL EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN YOUR LIFE



PERSONALIZATION

WHEN YOU FEEL PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THINGS YOU CAN'T CONTROL



OWNING THE TRUTH

WHEN YOU ARE CERTAIN YOU ARE RIGHT AND YOUR OPINION IS THE TRUTH



SHOULD-THINKING

WHEN YOU HAVE RULES OR EXPECTATIONS OF HOW THINGS OR PEOPLE SHOULD BE/ACT



EMOTIONAL REASONING

WHEN YOU BELIEVE THAT HOW YOU FEEL IS EVIDENCE OR REFLECTS REALITY



OVERGENERALIZING

WHEN A SINGLE NEGATIVE EVENT OCCURS AND YOU BELIEVE IT'S A PATTERN



LABELING

WHEN YOU LABEL YOURSELF OR SOMEONE NEGATIVELY SUCH AS "I'M A LOSER"



JUST-WORLD THINKING

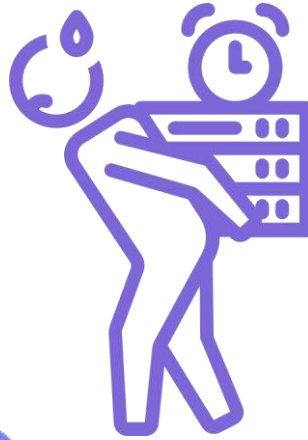
WHEN YOU ASSUME THAT EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD WILL BE BALANCED FAIRLY



FORTUNE-TELLING

WHEN YOU THINK THE FUTURE IS SET IN STONE & OUTCOME IS SURE

Work-related stressors



- Deadlines
- Workload
- Interpersonal dynamics
- Job insecurity
- Lack of control
- Ambiguity in the role
- Poor work-life balance
- Job dissatisfaction
- High expectations

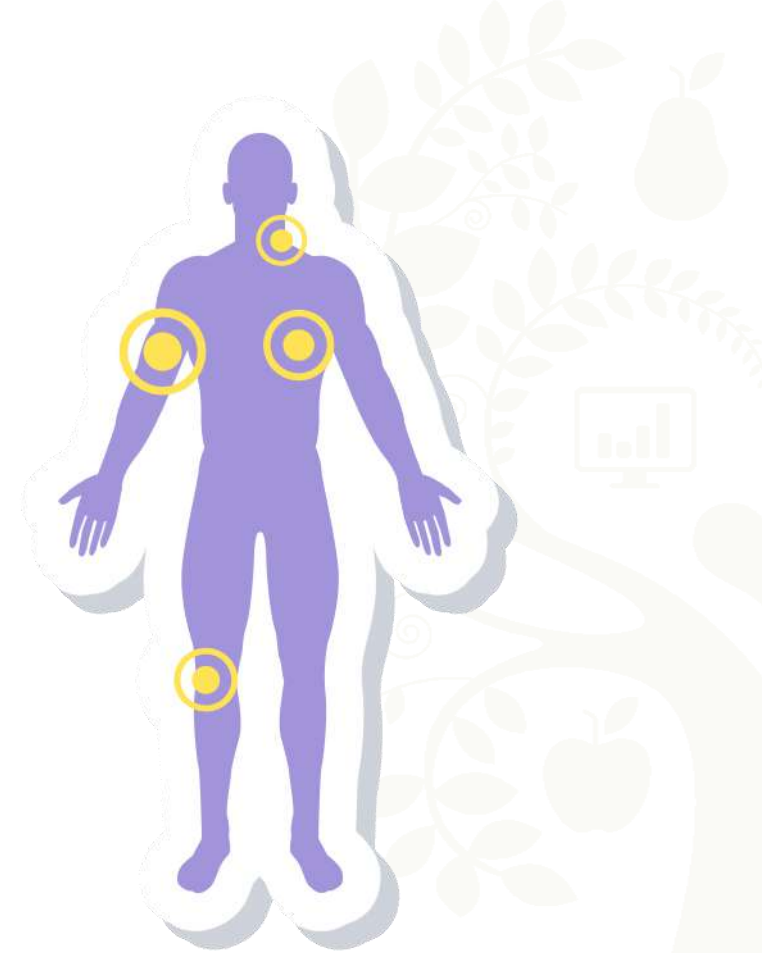
Personal life stressors

- Relationship challenges
- Financial difficulties
- Health concerns
- Major life changes
- Parenting challenges
- Isolation & loneliness
- Personal trauma
- Work-life imbalance





Recognising the signs & symptoms



Physical symptoms of anxiety



Increased heart
rate or
palpitations



Sleep problems



Headaches



Trembling/shaking



Chest pain



Dizziness



Hyperventilating



Muscle tension or
aches



Nausea



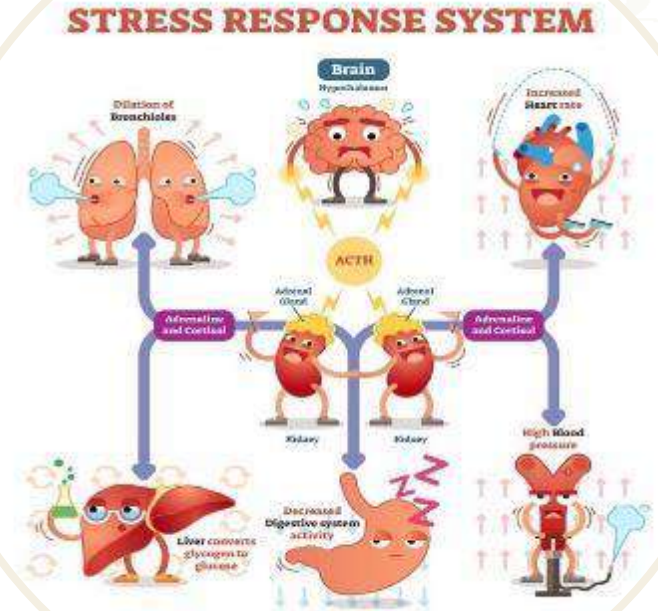
Fatigue



Sweating

What is going on in the body?

- Stress response activation
- Cortisol release & adrenaline surge
- Sympathetic nervous system dominance
- Blood flow redistributions
- Increased heart rate and respiration
- Heightened sensory perception
- Muscle tension



Emotional symptoms of anxiety



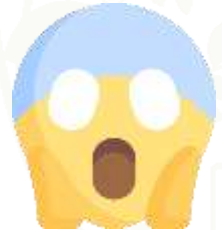
Excessive
worry/fear



Impatient/irritability



Restlessness



Sense of dread



Feeling tense or
on edge



Mood swings



Self-doubt



Overwhelmed

Behavioural symptoms of anxiety



Avoidance
/isolation



Changes in sleep
patterns



Changes in
appetite



Nervous habits



Fidgeting



Excessive reassurance
seeking



Increased
substance use



Procrastination



Excessive planning



Compulsive checking



Impaired decision
making



Perfectionism

Cognitive symptoms of anxiety



Catastrophic
thinking



Racing thoughts



Difficulty concentrating/
mind blanks



Negative self-talk



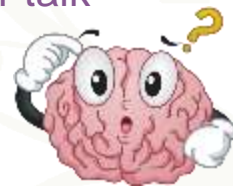
Intrusive or obsessive
thoughts



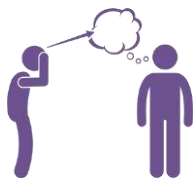
Overthinking



Excessive worry



All-or-nothing
thinking



Mind reading



Perceived lack of control



Selective attention

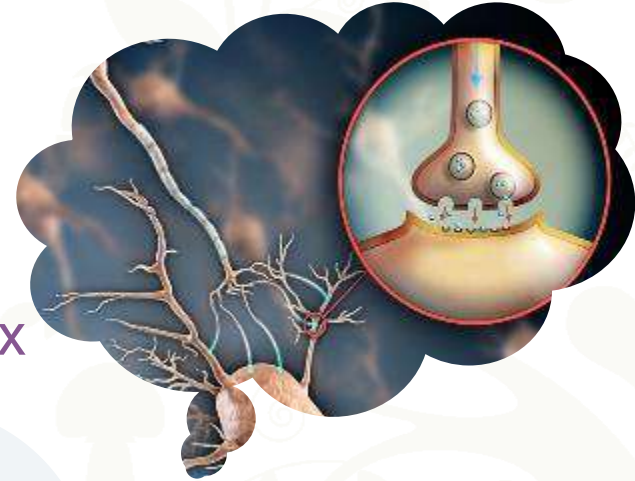


Memory distortions



What is going on in the brain?

- Increase in amygdala
 - Our threat detection part of our brain is bigger
- Reduction in hippocampus & prefrontal cortex
 - Less connectivity between regions
- Neuroplasticity
 - New neural pathways



Understanding panic attacks

A panic attack is a sudden onset of intense fear or discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes. It is accompanied by physical and cognitive symptoms.



Duration & peaks:

Typically peaks within 10 minutes

Can last longer, but prolonged attacks may indicate a different condition

Triggers:

Panic attacks can be triggered by stress, specific phobias, traumatic events, or even occur without an apparent cause.



Types of anxiety disorders



Types of anxiety disorder



Anxiety disorder	Definition	Key features
Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)	Excessive and persistent worry about various aspects of life, often without a specific trigger.	Generalised anxiety, restlessness, muscle tension, and difficulty concentrating.
Social anxiety disorder	Intense fear of being judged or negatively evaluated in social situations.	Avoidance of social events, physical symptoms (blushing, sweating), and anticipatory anxiety.
Panic disorder	Recurrent, unexpected panic attacks accompanied by intense fear and physical symptoms.	Shortness of breath, chest pain, palpitations, and fear of losing control.

Types of anxiety disorder continued...



Anxiety disorder	Definition	Key features
Phobias	Extreme and irrational fear of specific objects, situations, or activities.	Avoidance behaviour, panic attacks, extreme fear.
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	Occurs after exposure to a traumatic event, characterised by intrusive memories, nightmares, and hypervigilance.	Flashbacks, avoidance of reminders, emotional numbness, nightmares, intrusive memories, negative mood and cognition.
Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	Presence of obsessions (intrusive, unwanted thoughts) and compulsions (repetitive behaviours).	Obsessional, compulsions, interference with daily life.

Types of anxiety disorder continued...

- Agoraphobia
- Separation anxiety disorder
- Selective mutism
- Illness anxiety disorder (hypochondriasis)
- Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)
- Trichotillomania (hair-pulling disorder)
- Excoriation (skin-picking disorder)
- Hoarding disorder
- Acute stress disorder





GAD-7 Anxiety Test

Key:

- Not at all = 0 points
- Several days = 1 points
- More than half the days = 2 points
- Nearly every day = 3 points

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems:

- 1) Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge?
- 2) Not being able to stop or control worrying?
- 3) Worrying too much about different things?
- 4) Trouble relaxing?
- 5) Being so restless that it is hard to sit still?
- 6) Becoming easily annoyed or irritable?
- 7) Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen?





The impact
(wellbeing and job
performance)





Impact on wellbeing

- Negative impact on physical health
- Decreased mental/emotional health
- Decreased social wellbeing

Impact on job performance

- Decreased productivity
- Increased absenteeism
- Impaired decision-making
- Impact on team-dynamics



Strategies for anxiety





Practical tips to support anxiety

Practical tips for the mind

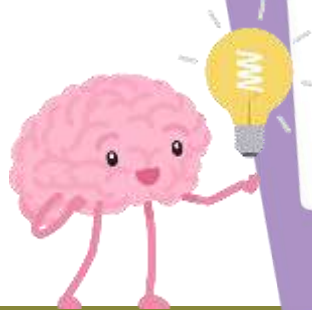
Practical tips for the body



Practical tips to support anxiety

The mind

- Mindfulness meditation
- Deep breathing
- Cognitive behavioural techniques
- Journalling
- Professional support



The body

- Regular physical exercise
- Sleep hygiene
- Balanced nutrition
- Limiting caffeine and alcohol
- Social support and connection



The Mind - Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and aware in the current moment, without judgment or distraction.

- Mindfulness activities
 - Meditation
 - Gratitude practice
 - Breathing
 - Mindful eating, walking or gardening
 - Stroking your pet
 - *What else can you practice mindfully?*



4:6 Breathing

1. Sit comfortably in your chair
2. Close your eyes, if comfortable
3. Feel your feet grounded into the floor (relaxed), arms resting by your side
4. Gently **breathe in** through your nose, feeling your belly and diaphragm rise, to a **count of 4**
5. Gently **breathe out** through your nose, feeling your belly and diaphragm deflate, to a **count of 6**



Grounding exercise

Look around the room and notice...

5 things you can see

4 things you can touch

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste





The Mind – Cognitive behavioural techniques

Cognitive-behavioural techniques involve identifying and challenging negative thought patterns and behaviours.



- Focuses on identifying and challenging negative thought patterns.
- Emphasises the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
- Aims to modify cognitive distortions and irrational beliefs.

CBT exercise



A – Activating event	B – Beliefs	C – Consequences	D – Dispute & reframe	E – Evaluate new emotions
Identify the specific situation or event that triggers anxiety (e.g., giving a presentation at work).	Explore and record automatic thoughts and beliefs associated with the activating event (e.g., "I must be perfect," "Everyone will judge me").	Examine the emotional and behavioural consequences of these beliefs (e.g., increased anxiety, avoidance behaviours).	Challenge and dispute irrational beliefs by asking, "Is this thought based on facts or assumptions?" Reframe the thought to be more realistic and balanced (e.g., "I don't need to be perfect, and it's okay to make mistakes").	Assess the impact of reframing on emotions and behaviours. Encourage more adaptive responses and coping strategies (e.g., deep breathing, positive self-talk).

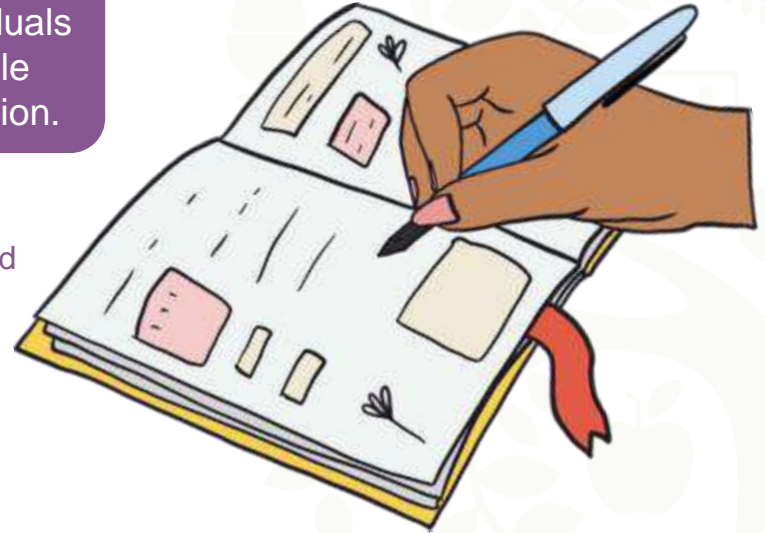


The Mind – Journaling

Journaling is beneficial for anxiety as it provides a structured outlet for self-expression, helping individuals gain insight into their thoughts and emotions while promoting a sense of clarity and emotional regulation.

Prompts for journalling to help with anxiety:

- Write about a recent situation that triggered anxiety and explore the associated thoughts and feelings.
- Reflect on moments of accomplishment and personal strengths to boost self-esteem.
- Track daily stressors and note how you responded, identifying effective coping strategies.
- Write a letter to yourself, offering encouragement and kindness during difficult times.
- Create a worry list, categorising concerns as solvable or unsolvable, and brainstorm solutions for the former.



The Mind – Professional support



Therapy is beneficial for anxiety as it provides a supportive and structured environment for individuals to explore and understand the root causes of their anxiety, learn coping strategies, and develop skills to manage and alleviate symptoms.

Types of therapy for anxiety:

- CBT
- Exposure therapy
- Mindfulness-based therapy
- Dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT)
- Acceptance & commitment therapy
- Psychodynamic therapy
- Interpersonal therapy
- Eye movement desensitisation & reprocessing



Signposting



Signpost examples:

- **Hub of Hope** – A UK-based mental health signposting platform connecting individuals to local support services and resources.
- **Mind** - A UK-based mental health charity with information and resources; also offers a global perspective.
- **Samaritans** - A global organisation providing confidential emotional support to individuals in crisis through helpline services.
- **IAPT/Talking therapy** – An NHS service that provides evidence-based psychological treatments for common mental health conditions. You can refer yourself online and do not have to be referred by a GP.
- **Betterhelp** - An online counselling platform offering access to licensed therapists for mental health support and therapy.
- **World Health Organisation (WHO)** - Global mental health resources and information provided by the WHO.
- **Psychology Today** - Offers a global directory of therapists, psychiatrists, and support groups.
- **Befrienders Worldwide** - A global network of emotional support helplines in over 30 countries.

The Body – Regular exercise



Exercise is beneficial for anxiety as it promotes the release of endorphins, reduces stress hormones, and improves sleep, contributing to a more balanced and resilient mental state.

Practical tips to exercise more:

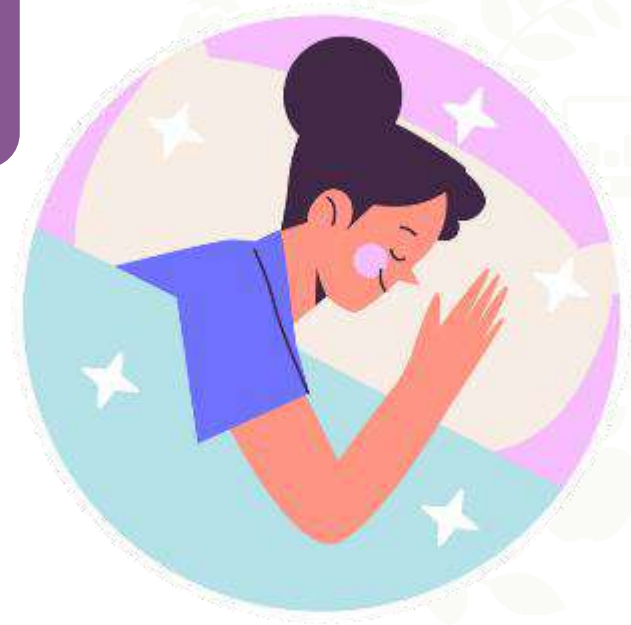
- Start small
- Choose enjoyable activities
- Incorporate into daily routine
- Set realistic goals
- Find a workout buddy
- Explore home workouts
- Mix it up
- Use technology
- Prioritise consistency over intensity

The Body – Sleep hygiene

Prioritising good sleep hygiene is beneficial for anxiety as it fosters a conducive environment for restful sleep, supporting emotional regulation, reducing cognitive disruptions, and contributing to overall mental well-being.

Practical tips for sleep hygiene:

- Consistent sleep schedule
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine
- Optimise sleep environment
- Limit exposure to screens before bed
- Watch your diet
- Limit naps
- Mind your sleep position
- Seek natural light exposure



The Body – Balanced nutrition



Balanced nutrition is essential for anxiety as it promotes optimal brain function and mood regulation through the provision of essential nutrients.

Practical tips to promote a balanced diet:

- Incorporate a variety of fruits & vegetables
- Choose whole grains
- Include lean proteins
- Consume healthy fats
- Stay hydrated
- Limit processed sugars, processed foods, and alcohol
- Monitor caffeine intake
- Practice mindful eating
- Plan and prepare meals
- Consider professional guidance



Nutrition

- Healthy fats
- Protein
- Carbs
- Fibre
- Eat the rainbow



The Body – Social support

Maintaining social support and connection is beneficial for anxiety as it provides a network for emotional expression, shared experiences, and practical assistance, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation.

Practical tips for building social support:

- Initiate regular social interactions
- Join clubs or groups
- Volunteer in the community
- Attend social events
- Reconnect with old friends
- Utilise technology & social media mindfully
- Open up and share
- Practice active listening
- Encourage quality time





Other Practical tips - The Body

Consider other holistic practices, such as:

- Acupuncture
- Craniosacral therapy
- Vagus nerve stimulation





Practical tips - Environment

Consider your environment:

- Finding flow - hobbies / creativity / music / volunteering
- Engaging the senses - touch, nature
- Circadian rhythm - light and sleep





Creating a supportive work environment





Creating a Supportive Work Environment for Individuals with Anxiety

- Open communication
- Flexible work arrangements
- Mental health policies
- Training for managers
- Workspace design
- Stress-reduction initiatives
- Promote work-life balance





How to support someone with anxiety



- Active listening
- Check-in regularly
- Offer assistance
- Respect boundaries
- Be mindful of language
- Educate the team
- Suggest resources

Further information...

Podcasts

- **Rangan Chatterjee** – *Feel Better Live More* - Five Simple steps to reduce anxiety, stress and toxic thinking with Dr Caroline Leaf, 8 June 2022, <https://drchatterjee.com/five-simple-steps-to-reduce-anxiety-stress-and-toxic-thinking-with-dr-caroline-leaf/>
- **Dr Rupy Aujla** - *The Doctor's Kitchen* - #108 How to Worry Less and be Ten Times Happier with Owen O'Kane, 07 Jul 2021
<https://thedoctorskitchen.com/podcasts/108-how-to-worry-less-and-be-ten-times-happier-with-owen-okan>

Charities

Anxiety UK anxietyuk.org.uk Tel: 03444 775 774

Mental Health Foundation mentalhealth.org.uk

Mind mind.org.uk Tel: 0300 123 3393

Samaritans samaritans.org Tel: 116 123

Books

- 'How to build a better brain'
Kimberley Wilson
- 'Why has nobody told me this before?' *Dr Julie Smith*



SUPER
WELLNESS

Additional Resources

What makes it worse:

1 Caffeine: Increases stress hormone levels, and can affect sleep by blocking sleep-promoting adenosine receptors in the brain.

2 Alcohol: as it wears off, mini-withdrawal symptoms can range from restless sleep to bad dreams to full-blown panic attacks

3 Aged, fermented and smoked foods (cheese, red wine, salami): some people to break down the histamine they contain, causing their adrenaline to rise and making them anxious

4 Sugar and refined carbs: blood sugar spikes cause stress hormones to surge. Adrenaline can cause panic symptoms such as sweating, light-headedness and palpitations.

Nutrition-centred Wellbeing Tips for ANXIETY

Constant Worrying

Headaches

Insomnia

Difficulty breathing

Muscle tension

Rapid heartbeat

Stomach issues

ANXIETY

What makes it better:

1 Nutritious foods

2 A bath with Epsom salts - thanks to calming magnesium

3 Vitamin D

4 A cup of chamomile tea

5 Turmeric

6 Mindfulness

7 Deep breathing (in for 5, out for 5)

8 Exercise

9 Looking after gut health (plenty of fibre, water, live yoghurt) as our gut bacteria influence neurotransmitters

10th October is World Mental Health Day Copyright © SuperWellness. www.superwellness.co.uk

NUTRITION TIPS FOR A HEALTHY STRESS RESPONSE

Stress can be triggered by changes in our environment, our body, or our thoughts. Our body is designed to deal with stress and there are things we can do to support a healthy stress response.

Our fight or flight response

Stress can be positive, keeping us alert, motivated, and ready to deal with danger

Muscles tense, blood flow to the muscles increases, heart races, breath gets faster

Our adrenal glands release hormones: adrenaline, noradrenaline, cortisol

Stress becomes negative when it builds up over time, causing wear and tear both physical and emotional. This can eventually lead to physical symptoms, or compulsive behaviours linked to food, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, shopping...

Magnesium relaxes tension

Green leafy veg, nuts, and seeds, legumes

Omega 3s improve our adaptation to stress

Walnuts

Potassium helps lower blood pressure

Low veggies (cucumber, avocado, tomato)

Complex carbs boost serotonin and keep blood sugar balanced. Avoid sugar and refined carbs, they provide only short-term relief

Stress and the 'gut-brain' axis: it's more than a gut feeling!

1. **Look after your gut bacteria:** they help regulate your stress response but are also altered by chronic stress.

2. **Include fermented foods rich in probiotics**

3. **Avoid high fat diets** as they are a risk factor for gut inflammation and affect our stress response.

4. **Short chain fatty acids** are key to gut-brain communication. We get them from:

- fibre (wheat, rye, barley)
- dairy, beans, onion
- green bananas, baked potato (skin), legumes
- apples, apricots, oranges, carrots
- cheese and butter (in moderation)

Vitamin C supports our adrenal glands and helps protect the immune system

Citrus, papaya

Exercise boosts endorphins and takes your focus away from stressful thoughts

B Vitamins may improve our mood

Whole grains, meat, fish, legumes

Black tea may speed up recovery from stress

Green tea, chamomile

Try herbs such as St John's Wort (not alongside antidepressants), St. Leonards root

Take regular breaks to prevent stress from building up

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Understanding anxiety

Supplementary Document



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- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anxiety/symptoms-causes/syc-20350961>
- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/about-anxiety/>
- <https://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety>
- <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/anxiety-disorders>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/anxiety>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/anxiety>



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