



## ANXIETY: IMPROVE YOUR MOOD

Anxiety can affect any of us, at different times and in different ways. Unlike stress, which tends to come and go according to the external pressures in our lives, anxiety can appear to come out of nowhere, giving rise to unpleasant physical symptoms that can make you feel panicky and out of control. You are also likely to find that you can't 'switch off' worrying thoughts.

We experience the symptoms of anxiety when the fight-or-flight ("threat") response is triggered. Fight-or-flight causes the heart to beat faster and the muscles to tense ready for action. Our breathing speeds up so we take in more oxygen; our digestion slows down, and we sweat to keep our body temperature constant.

This is actually a normal and necessary response to danger, helping us to be more effective in fighting the danger or running away, but unfortunately it can be triggered when we don't really need it, *even when the danger only exists in our own mind.*

In addition to uncomfortable physical sensations, we may become hyper-alert, scanning our environment for possible threats. We may overestimate the danger, and underestimate our ability to cope with it. We may then start to avoid situations in which we feel anxious.

You may experience anxiety at particular times, for example when you are meeting new people, going out alone, or giving presentations. You may have a phobia (for example, heights, open spaces, dogs or blood). Health anxiety is also quite common. Alternatively, you may find that you worry all the time about many different things (This is usually described as "generalized anxiety").

If you suffer from anxiety, it's important that you learn ways to manage the anxiety without avoiding the situations in which you feel anxious; otherwise you may find yourself doing less and less, and your life may become quite restricted. Also, each time you avoid something you are strengthening the idea that what you are avoiding is dangerous or threatening.

## What can you do?

If you have severe and long-standing anxiety you may need professional support from an organisation like Oasis-Talk. However, there are a number of self-help strategies you can try.

### Learn relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques can help reduce the symptoms of fight-or-flight. Try progressive muscle relaxation (going through your body tensing each group of muscles in turn as you breathe in, hold for a moment then relax as you breathe out). Practise breathing slowly and deeply. Start by breathing out as far as you can, then allow your lungs to slowly refill, as if you were inflating a balloon.

### Be kind to yourself

Self-criticism can make anxiety worse. Watch out for that judgmental inner voice and see if you can replace it with a kinder one. What would a really good friend be saying to you right now?

### Use simple distraction (Note: This is only likely to work in the short-term)

Distract yourself from worrying thoughts for example by reading, listening to music, doing a Sudoku puzzle, or just paying attention to your surroundings.

### Switch off the spotlight

Anxiety can make us feel as if we are standing in a spotlight with everyone looking at us and noticing how anxious we feel. Check this out by looking around you – in all probability, you'll find that most people are preoccupied with their own concerns, and don't even notice you!

### Tackle the anxiety-provoking thoughts

Are you blowing things out of proportion? Predicting disaster? Making unrealistic demands of yourself or other people? Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a way of challenging and changing unhelpful thinking patterns and behaviour. At Oasis-Talk, we have a team of experienced therapists who can help you to learn and practise CBT. [Need more help?](#)

Visit [Anxiety UK](#), [Mind](#) or take a look at the information about anxiety on the [NHS Choices website](#).