

# Disability awareness

## Anxiety Disorders

**Anxiety is a normal emotion we all experience as part of our ‘fight or flight’ reflex, designed to protect us from danger. If your anxiety is so severe it affects your day-to-day life and ability to function that is when it becomes an anxiety disorder. People with anxiety often try to avoid stressful situations but it is impossible to avoid everything which causes you anxiety and by not facing these situations you can make your anxiety about them worse.**

Anxiety causes a release of adrenaline which can cause physical symptoms or what we call a panic attack, when you experience heart palpitations, an increased heart rate, chest pains, dizziness and breathlessness which mimic that of a heart attack and can therefore be really frightening. However, you are not in any danger.

Depression and anxiety often occur together. Around 60 per cent of people who have anxiety also have symptoms of depression. Medication such as tranquillisers and sleeping pills are often prescribed to patients with anxiety but tend to only treat the symptoms rather than causes. Participation in talking therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy can be more effective as they help you address why you feel anxious and help you to develop your own way of coping.

There are a number of conditions that come under the umbrella term ‘Anxiety Disorder’ including:

### Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

- ⦿ A long-term condition that causes someone to feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues, rather than one specific event
- ⦿ People with GAD feel anxious most days and often struggle to remember the last time they felt relaxed.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)/Acute Stress Disorder

- ⦿ Caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events such as accidents, violent crime or military action
- ⦿ Someone with PTSD often relive the traumatic event through nightmares and flashbacks, and may experience feelings of isolation, irritability and guilt. They may also have problems sleeping, such as insomnia, and find concentrating difficult.

### Panic Disorder

- ⦿ Recurring and regular panic attacks, often for no apparent reason.

### Phobias

- ⦿ An extreme, irrational fear of an animal, object, place or situation that most people would not fear
- ⦿ People who have phobias either avoid the situations they fear or are intensely anxious in them.

### Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- ⦿ Where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive activity
- ⦿ An obsession is an unwanted unpleasant and intrusive thought, image or urge that repeatedly enters a person’s mind, causing feelings of anxiety or disgust
- ⦿ A compulsion is a repetitive behaviour that someone feels they need to do to try to relieve the unpleasant feelings brought on by the obsessive thought
- ⦿ Some people with OCD may spend an hour or so a day engaged in obsessive-compulsive thinking and behaviour, but for others the condition can completely take over their lives.

## Symptoms of anxiety people with an anxiety disorder may experience include:

### Physical symptoms

- ⦿ Heart palpitations
- ⦿ Tense muscles
- ⦿ Muscle aches
- ⦿ Sweating
- ⦿ Dizziness
- ⦿ Fainting
- ⦿ Stomach problems
- ⦿ Hyperventilation or shortness of breath
- ⦿ Nausea.

### Changes in behaviour

- ⦿ Behaving out of character
- ⦿ Sudden burst of energy, speed or strength
- ⦿ Shakiness
- ⦿ Being very still or 'frozen'
- ⦿ Difficulty concentrating
- ⦿ Tiredness
- ⦿ Difficulty sleeping.

### Causing issues in daily life such as:

- ⦿ Poor concentration and struggling to complete certain routine tasks for example driving or work tasks
- ⦿ Feelings of panic and confusion
- ⦿ Irritability and mood swings
- ⦿ Constantly worrying – overestimating danger or underestimating their own ability to cope
- ⦿ Avoiding certain people and places, particularly social situations
- ⦿ Experiencing low self-confidence, self-doubt and inability to make decisions

### Changes in thought

- ⦿ Sudden excitement or irritability
- ⦿ Feeling of time going slowly
- ⦿ Excessive worrying or anticipating a problem
- ⦿ Extremely focused thinking
- ⦿ Mind racing
- ⦿ Going blank
- ⦿ Unpleasant thoughts
- ⦿ Experiencing feelings of dread or impending doom.

- ⦿ Thoughts becoming increasingly and persistently negative
- ⦿ Feeling that problems are impossible to solve or unable to perform tasks
- ⦿ Finding it hard to sit still and be constantly fidgeting
- ⦿ Eating too much or too little or at different time and possible changes to digestive system
- ⦿ Smoking or drinking too much or using drugs.

### Contact us:

If you would like further information on how we can help you, please get in touch with us:

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