

## Shrink your worries

For day-to-day anxieties, the following can help:

- **Question** - Is it really a problem?
- **Talk it out** - Share with someone you trust.
- **Write it out** - Put it on paper. It's easier to see it in perspective.
- **Shrug it off** - Raise your shoulders, and then drop them. Relax your whole body.
- **Breathe it away** - Inhale deeply; exhale with a sigh a few times. Let your tension go as you breathe.
- **Set an 'appointment with worry'** - Give yourself 15 minutes to concentrate on your worry, then firmly leave it behind.
- **Work it off** - Do something physical. Give your tension an outlet.
- **Laugh it off** - Look for some humour in the situation.
- **Distance it** - Imagine it a few years from now. How much will it matter then?
- **Balance it** - Find a good side as well as the bad.
- **Exaggerate it** - Picture the worst that can really happen. How likely is it?
- **Hold it** - Say 'stop', pause and steady your thoughts. Now take a fresh look.
- **Plan for it** - Get up earlier to prepare to face it.
- **Make it positive** - Surround yourself with joyful colours and sounds and use your strengths.

## Reaching out Others who can help

If you are experiencing more than low levels of anxiety, i.e. to the extent that it is interfering with your life, then seek help initially from your GP.

- Have a check-up to rule out any physical cause for your symptoms. Your doctor may refer you for specialist help e.g. a psychologist, counsellor, cognitive-behavioural therapist or other mental health service.
- Your doctor may prescribe medication, e.g. tranquillisers or antidepressants, mostly in conjunction with other strategies for managing anxiety.
- Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) focuses on helping you learn about how your thoughts and beliefs

affect your behaviour. It teaches ways to change unhelpful thoughts.

- You can call your Community Mental Health Centre for advice. Look in the front of your white pages under "Hospitals and other Health Services". Some Community Mental Health Centres require a referral from a GP.

## Resources

The Mental Health Foundation has a comprehensive range of information on mental health and wellbeing including pamphlets, books and videos for purchase or loan, and our Relax for Health CD is available at a cost of \$10.

The CD is designed to help you relax deeply and leave you feeling refreshed and more energetic. The two relaxation methods used have been shown by research to be beneficial to physical and mental health. Instructions are included.

Internet sites can contain useful information, but not all are helpful so exercise some caution. Two recommended sites are:

[www.socialphobia.org.nz](http://www.socialphobia.org.nz)  
[www.phobic.org.nz](http://www.phobic.org.nz)

## Contact us

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## Anxiety and how to handle it



 **Mental Health Foundation  
of New Zealand**

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

Making mental health everybody's business.

## What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a normal and healthy response to danger and threat e.g. feeling stressed before an interview or exam, or scared that you can't cope with demands placed on you.
- It focuses body and mind on dealing with a problem - the body gets ready for action ('fight or flight') and the brain focuses on thinking through every possible escape route or dangerous scenario. The flow of adrenaline into the blood stream helps us run faster and think our way out of a tricky situation more quickly.
- This is useful when there is a life-threatening danger to deal with, but can be unhelpful when there is less threat.
- When we are anxious we feel wound up, nervous, worried, tense and unable to think clearly. We may go over a problem in our minds until we come up with a solution.
- Feelings can range from being a bit uneasy to a continuing sense of dread, or feeling panicky and frightened.

## How does anxiety affect us?

Anxiety functions similarly to physical pain, calling attention to danger or risk. However, the complex mixture of physical sensations, thoughts and actions means that we can exaggerate the potential danger and feel tense and anxious even though we are not currently under threat. Some level of anxiety is normal but at times the level of anxiety can be too high for us to get on with everyday life.

## Recognising anxiety

Indications that this may be an issue would be if levels of anxiety are affecting us e.g.:

- not being able to speak in a social situation.
- unable to go out, avoiding public places or activities.
- re-routing or restricting travel plans to avoid a particular route e.g. going over a bridge is too difficult.

We feel the effects primarily in three ways:

**Physical effects:** Racing or pounding heart, sweating, breathlessness, dizziness, shaking or trembling, chest pain or tightness, nausea and stomach pain.

**Thoughts:** Thoughts are often repetitive, with a fixed view of a situation that may bear little relation to reality. Thoughts often escalate e.g. from "Oh no, a traffic jam, I'll be late for my meeting," to "And if I'm late I might miss this sale, disappoint everyone and be fired."

**Behaviour:** Anxiety can make us withdraw or avoid situations that we know make us stressed.

## Anxiety disorders

Adults and children who are constantly anxious may have trouble with sleeping or concentration; feel restless or irritable and fatigued.

For some, anxiety causes such sustained discomfort and disruption to their everyday life that it is called an 'anxiety disorder'.

There are a number of diagnoses of anxiety disorders including:

- generalised anxiety
- agoraphobia
- social phobia
- panic disorder
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- post-traumatic stress disorder

Symptoms may vary, but they all have in common persistent feelings of high anxiety causing discomfort and disruption to everyday living.

If you experience this level of anxiety constantly, or aspects of how you live your life are being adversely affected, then you may need to consider seeking help.

## Panic attacks

### What are they & what can you do

- Panic attacks are common, with one in 10 people having at least one attack during their lives and they are not life-threatening.
- They involve feelings of severe anxiety that start and finish quite suddenly.
- Uncomfortable physical symptoms of intense anxiety can make people feel that they are about to die, collapse or lose control of their minds.
- These frightening thoughts in turn intensify the panic.
- Concentrate on breathing and knowing that these feelings will pass.
- Tell family, whanau, friends or workmates you trust about your experience. You will feel more comfortable if they know that you might have to stop to 'wait out' a panic attack.

## Managing anxiety

### Self Help

- Learn to breathe more slowly and deeply when anxious. Breathe with the bottom of your lungs rather than from the top i.e. when you breathe in your stomach goes out, not your ribs. Learning meditation can help with breathing.
- Talk to friends and family about how you are feeling and share your thoughts with them.
- Stay active - walk, jog, swim, garden or do regular exercise that you enjoy.
- Relax regularly. Try a relaxation CD or yoga. Sleep is the most important relaxation, so try to establish a regular sleep routine.
- Self-help books are usually based on cognitive techniques. Support groups and talking to other people who managed anxiety and panic can be useful.
- Avoid substances that aggravate anxiety and panic. These include caffeine, alcohol and cannabis.

### Relax regularly

