

Breathing through Anxiety

Here is a simple exercise to help manage anxiety on a daily basis.

- Sit in a comfortable posture, with your spine erect; let the shoulders drop.
- Close your eyes if it feels comfortable.
- Bring your attention to your belly, feeling it rise or expand gently on the in-breath and fall or recede on the out-breath.
- Keep the focus on your breathing, "Being with" each in-breath for its full duration and with each out-breath for its full duration.
- Every time that you notice that your mind has wandered off the breath, softly note what it was that took you away and then gently escort your attention back to your belly and the feeling of the breath coming in and out of your body.
- If your mind wanders from the breath a thousand times, then your job is simply to bring it back to the breath every time.

Adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) Full Catastrophe Living, p. 58

For Further Information Or To
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Understanding Anxiety and Panic Attacks



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Understanding Anxiety

Anxiety is the body's natural response to danger - an automatic alarm that goes off when you feel threatened, under pressure, or are facing a stressful situation. It is our body's way of letting us know we are not happy with some aspect of our lives.

What is a Panic Attack?

A panic attack is an exaggeration of the body's normal response to fear, stress or excitement. It is the rapid build-up of overwhelming sensations, such as a pounding heartbeat, feeling faint, sweating, nausea, chest pains, breathing discomfort, feelings of losing control, shaky limbs and legs turning to jelly.

If you experience this, you may fear that you are going mad, blacking out, or having a heart attack. You may be convinced you are going to die in the course of the attack – making this a terrifying experience.

Panic attacks come on very quickly - symptoms usually peaking within 10 minutes. Most panic attacks last for between 5 and 20 minutes. You may have one or two panic attacks and never experience another, or you may have attacks once a month or several times each week. For some people they seem to come without warning and strike at random.

What Causes Anxiety?

There is no one cause of anxiety, rather there are a number of factors that may contribute to the development of anxious thoughts and behaviour. Some causes of anxiety can include:

- Stress
- Trauma
- Abuse/Neglect
- Upbringing/Parenting
- Life Experiences
- Life Transition/Change
- Workplace Conflict
- Bullying
- Family Break-Up
- Loss & Bereavement

What treatments are available?

The most common forms of treatment offered are counselling and medication. Your GP can advise you on medication.

How can Counselling help?

Counselling, particularly cognitive-behavioural therapy has been found to be very effective in the treatment of anxiety.

Cognitive behavioural therapy is made up of two components:

The first component - cognitive therapy - is one of the most common and well supported treatments for anxiety. It is based on the idea that a person's thoughts in response to an

event or situation causes the difficult feelings and behaviours (i.e., it is often not an event that causes distress but a person's interpretation of that event). The aim of cognitive therapy is to help people to identify unhelpful beliefs and thought patterns, which are often automatic, negative and irrational, and replace them with more positive and helpful ways of thinking.

The second component of cognitive-behavioural therapy involves assistance with changing behaviours that are associated with anxiety, such as avoidance or restlessness. These may be dealt with through learning relaxation techniques and through changes in the way that certain situations are handled.

What else will help?

- Exercise or engaging in some form of daily physical activity
- Eating a nutritious, well-balanced diet
- Obtaining an adequate amount of sleep
- Seeking emotional support from friends and family
- Monitoring how you think about stress and reduce and/or change thoughts which are negative
- Reducing or eliminating the use of alcohol and drugs and limiting caffeine intake