

Techniques to help manage anxiety

What is anxiety?

Most people do feel anxious from time to time as this is a normal response to stress, change or unsettling periods in one's life. Anxiety can be a feeling of unease, worrying thoughts, feeling of dread or feeling fearful. It may be mild or severe and it usually passes once a situation is over.

Anxiety can be brought on by different situations or experiences. What triggers anxiety for one person to another can be very different. However, in most cases this is simply our body's natural reaction to a perceived danger, giving us a rush of adrenaline which can help to focus our attention and respond to a situation if we find ourselves in immediate danger. It is sometimes called the "fight or flight" response. You may also hear it referred to as the flight, fight or freeze response. Learning to recognise what anxiety is, how it can affect you and what is making you anxious can help you to manage it.

How can anxiety make us feel?

Anxiety can have lots of physical symptoms – it can make our heart race, we might feel sweaty, shaky, sick or short of breath. As these physical symptoms are often unpleasant anxiety can also cause us to change our behavior, such as avoiding things that trigger the anxiety in the first place. When we are anxious our worries can feel overwhelming and difficult to cope with.

Coronavirus and anxiety

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak means that life is changing for all of us for a period of time. It is important to remember that everyone reacts differently and it is alright to have feelings of anxiety, stress, worry, sadness, anger, helplessness or feeling overwhelmed. Most people are expected to feel anxious at some point during this period however each person may experience this in different ways, at different times.

It is important to remember this situation is temporary and, whilst there is a limited amount we can do to control the situation, we can implement techniques to help us manage our mental health in this uncertain time.

Techniques to help manage anxiety

- Keep daily routine as normal as you can (maybe getting up and dressed at set times, contacting friends or family, completing a daily task at set times within the day).
- If possible get outside in the daylight each day either in the garden or going for a walk (while maintaining social distancing).
- If this is difficult consider sitting by an open window to allow fresh air and sunlight into your home. (Anxiety can sometimes make people feel breathless or tight in the chest and a fresh cool breeze has been found to help with breathlessness).
- Keep in contact with people over the phone/ internet or use services such as St Elizabeth hospice Emotional Well Being team to talk through your anxieties.
- Write down your worries- to help release them and allow you to address them at an appropriate time.
- Challenging negative thinking - If you are thinking about the worst that could happen try writing this down and then write what is actually happening. Are these the same?

- Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and stay hydrated. If possible avoid smoking or illegal drugs, and try not to drink too much alcohol. These may give you an instant high or rush however the after effects can make your mood feel much lower and will take longer to disappear.
- Continuing to be active regularly (this may be completing chair or bed based exercises or completing a daily task that keeps you active).
- Limit your time watching the news or using social media.
- Do things you enjoy such as reading/crafts/music/ games/gardening.
- Focus on the present and elements you have control over.
- Test out relaxation techniques ie: visualisation/ I feel, I see, I hear/ breathing exercises.

Relaxation is a valuable aspect of anxiety and stress management. It is evidenced that it can help to control both physical and mental symptoms.

Choosing a relaxation technique that works for you is very individual and like any exercise relaxation is most successful if practiced. a therapist can talk these through with you over the phone if you would like.

Things to consider when preparing to participate in a relaxation technique

- Choose a time when you are not likely to be disturbed.
- Make sure you are comfortable (clothing, temperature, lighting, posture).
- When relaxing to music choose music that is soothing, that you like and does not recall unhappy memories.
- Allow yourself plenty of time after you come out of relaxation.
- Sometimes using your own personal experience to help you relax can be more powerful than using a script or recording. Consider your memory/visual scene, think about the sounds that you heard, the smells and noises that surrounded you, the environment you were in, how hot or cold it was, what was the weather like, who was with you.
- If you would like additional information or support in relation to anxiety management or relaxation, please call the hospice OneCall number on 0800 56 70 111.

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