

Feeling anxious?



A guide to things that can help



Anxiety is a feeling of unease, fear or worry. Feeling anxious at times is normal. Feelings of anxiety could be related to a variety of things such as health, finances, work, or relationships. It is also possible to feel anxious without knowing what is causing you to feel that way.

A healthy level of anxiety can help you prepare for important tasks, such as studying for an exam or finishing a work project. Sometimes feelings of anxiety can be hard to control and they may impact on how you live your life.

There are things you can try to help with anxiety. This guide gives some ideas for ways to help manage anxiety and feel more able to cope, along with where to find support if you need it.

Signs of anxiety

Anxiety can affect us in different ways. It can affect the way we feel, the way we think, the way our body works, and the way we behave. It can lead to a range of symptoms, such as:

- feeling sick (nausea);
- strong, fast or irregular heartbeat;
- headaches and muscle tension;
- feeling dizzy or lightheaded;
- irritability;
- difficulty sleeping and/or tiredness;
- feeling restless or having difficulty concentrating;
- feeling like your mind is really busy with thoughts;
- feeling constantly unsettled or having a sense of dread;
- dwelling on negative experiences, or thinking over a situation again and again.

By noticing the signs, you can spot when you are becoming anxious and you can do something to help yourself feel better.

Things that might help with anxiety

If you are experiencing anxiety there are many things that you can do to help yourself manage how you are feeling. Have a read through the suggestions and try those things which you think will work best for you.

- Talk to someone about how you are feeling. Sometimes sharing how we feel can be the first step towards feeling better.
- Remind yourself that the symptoms and feelings you are experiencing are because of anxiety and that the feelings will pass.
- Keep a note in your diary or on your phone each time you get anxious. Use your notes to identify the things that make you feel this way. Then think about how you can deal with these things. Also, write down what works. This will help you feel more in control.
- Try to accept the things you cannot change.
- Try to shift the focus of your attention to something else that you like or find interesting. Distracting yourself from the anxiety you are feeling may help.
- Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet, and try to reduce or avoid caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and other drugs.
- Learn and use calming skills.
- Build the Take 5 steps to wellbeing into your daily routine.
- Use mental health and wellbeing apps.



Try calming skills

These calming techniques are shown to help symptoms of anxiety and stress. They aim to help bring your focus to the present moment, taking your mind off anxious thoughts.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1

You can use the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method to ground yourself.

To start, sit in a comfortable position and take a deep breath.

Next, try to focus on:

- 5 things you can see;
- 4 things you can feel;
- 3 things you can hear;
- 2 things you can smell;
- 1 good thing about yourself.

Breathing with puckered lips

- Breathe in normally for 2 seconds.
- Pucker your lips (as if you were drinking through a straw).
- Exhale through puckered lips for 4 seconds.
- Repeat until you feel calm.



Rhythmic movement

Moving in rhythm and repetitive movement can release tension and calm your mind. Some things you can try:

- Dancing.** It doesn't matter what type of dance, or whether you dance with others or alone.
- Walking.** Combine physical movement with mindfulness – pay attention to the sensation of walking, the rhythm of your breathing and your surroundings.
- Drumming.** Beat a drum or create a beat with your hands on an object or your body.

Notice the glimmers

Look for small moments of safety and connection in everyday life. Try to notice things you can:

- **see**, like a picture;
- **smell**, like freshly cut grass;
- **hear** that is soothing, like bird song;
- or **something enjoyable**, like seeing a dog play or feeling cozy in bed.

When you come across a glimmer in your day, allow yourself to stop and really take it in. Thinking of these moments can also help calm you.



Take 5 steps to wellbeing

Evidence suggests there are five steps you can take to improve your mental health and wellbeing. Doing these simple steps every day could help you feel more positive, allowing you to cope and respond better to feelings of anxiety. You are probably doing some of these steps already. The calming tools will help you take notice and be active, but there are other steps you can try.



Connect with the people around you – family, friends or neighbours. Building these connections will support you and help maintain and improve your wellbeing.



Don't be afraid to try something new. Rediscover an old hobby or interest, or simply set a challenge you will enjoy.





Exercising makes you feel good, so discover a physical activity you enjoy, like going for a walk, cycling, playing a sport or gardening.



Take a moment to be aware of the world around you and what you're feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.



Do something nice for a friend or stranger. Smile, volunteer your time or consider joining a community group.

Pick activities you will enjoy and that can fit into your everyday life. One activity can count for more than one step. For example, going for a walk with a friend could count towards connecting, being active and taking notice.

Mental health and wellbeing apps

The Health and Social Care apps library has information about apps for adults on topics such as anxiety, stress, sleep and more.



For more calming tools, ideas on how to Take 5, and to access mental health and wellbeing apps and much more, visit www.mindingyourhead.info



Get help

It's important to get help for anxiety if:

- it has lasted a long time;
- it is stopping you doing things you normally would do;
- you have tried things to help yourself, but you aren't feeling better.

Talk to your GP and tell them how you're feeling and what you've tried. It is possible to recover from mental health problems, and lots of people do – especially after getting support.

There are also many services in Northern Ireland that can provide mental health support. For more information, visit www.mindingyourhead.info/services



If you or someone you know is in distress or crisis, you can call Lifeline for free on 0808 808 8000. Trained counsellors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information, visit www.lifelinehelpline.info

If you or someone else is in immediate danger of suicide or you require urgent medical attention, call 999.



Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

www.publichealth.hscni.net

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