

Coping with Anxiety and/or Depression

By

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What is Anxiety?

- ❖ Anxiety is common
- ❖ It is the normal response to danger or stress
- ❖ Sometimes it can be helpful in small amounts
- ❖ It becomes a problem if :
 - It makes you uncomfortable & unable to enjoy life
 - It gets in the way of what you are trying to do
 - It stops you from doing things you would like to

Common Signs/Symptoms

❖ THOUGHTS:

- It will be terrible
- I won't be able to cope
- Everyone will notice

❖ Feelings:

- Worried
- Nervous
- Scared/Terrified
- On Edge/Tense

❖ Physical Symptoms:

- Increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Shaking
- Sweating
- Muscle tension

❖ Behaviour:

- Avoid people/places
- Avoid doing things

What Can I Do?

1. Learn to Relax:

- The breathing exercise: 'Belly breathing' very slowly and deeply in and out through your nose (5 sets)
- Progressive muscular relaxation: Tense (5 seconds) and relax (and repeat): hands, arms, face, shoulders and neck, chest and abdomen, legs and lower back, and whole body.

- Visualisation exercises: Imagine a relaxing scene using all of your senses (e.g. forest, beach etc.) Imagine how things would look, feel, taste, smell and sound within the image. Make positive statement like 'I am letting go of the tension – I can feel my body getting lighter as my tension begins to evaporate' etc.
- Self-soothe using your senses: Vision (e.g. candle), hearing (e.g. soothing music), smell (e.g. baking), taste (e.g. chocolate), touch (e.g. stroke your pet, have a massage) etc.

2. Learn to Manage Distressing Thoughts:

- Distract yourself: by engaging yourself in an interesting/absorbing activity; refocusing your attention on things around you; engaging in mental exercises e.g practising mental arithmetic, recalling a favourite holiday etc.
- Challenging worrying thoughts by:
 - asking yourself if the thought is based on fact
 - asking yourself if there is evidence against the thought (what would a loved one say?)

3. Learn to Face the Fear:

- Establish if there is something in particular that you are afraid of and that you tend to avoid (e.g. shopping in the supermarket alone)
- Arrange your fears in order of difficulty
- Plan a series of small, specific tasks of increasing difficulty so that you work through the list (use relaxation techniques etc.)
- Treat yourself after each victory!!

Additional Tools

❖ Problem-Solving Exercises:

- Pros and Cons (self/others; now/future)
- Action Plan: Goal, time to begin, possible problem, strategies to overcome problems, monitor progress)
- Priority list: Make a list of things you need to do in order of importance, and work through this systematically

❖ Sleep Management:

- Fix a bedtime and awakening time
- Avoid napping during the day if you can
- Avoid alcohol/caffeine 4-8 hours before bed
- Avoid heavy/spicy/ sugary food before bed
- Exercise regularly (but not just before bed)
- Ensure sleeping environment is comfortable
- Try warm milk/banana before bed
- Practise relaxation techniques
- Establish a pre-sleep ritual (e.g. warm bath)
- If wake: don't look at clock; count backwards from 50, visualising numbers, and repeat as often as necessary!

What is Depression?

- ❖ Most of us feel 'down' at some point
- ❖ Usually resolves spontaneously
- ❖ Only a problem if:
 - depressed for most of the day for 2 weeks +
 - don't enjoy things like before
 - marked change in sleep/appetite/energy levels
 - feeling hopeless
 - thoughts about wanting to die

Common Signs/Symptoms

❖ Thoughts:

- Negative thoughts about self, circs., future
- Loss of pleasure
- Loss of motivation

❖ Feelings:

- Sad/down/depressed
- Irritable/angry
- Numb

❖ Physical Symptoms:

- Lethargy/no energy
- Tired/slowed down
- Agitation/restlessness
- Loss/increased appetite
- Loss of sex drive
- Insomnia/hypersomnia

❖ Behaviour:

- Social withdrawal
- Inactivity/sleeping ++
- Overeating/not eating
- Arguing
- Substance misuse

What Can I Do?

1. Aforementioned Strategies: But aimed at managing the symptoms of depression. For example, with regard to thought challenging, focus on thoughts that make you sad or unhappy; with regard to problem-solving, focus on problems that contribute to your unhappiness; with regard to relaxation/self-soothing exercises, focus on activities that bring a sense of joy/peace/contentment.

2. Activity Monitoring and Scheduling:

Weekly Activity Schedule

WEEK BEGINNING

NAME

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Wake-9am							
9am-10am							
10am-11am							
11am-12noon							
12noon-1pm							
1pm-2pm							
2pm-3pm							
3pm-4pm							
4pm-5pm							
5pm-6pm							
6pm-7pm							
7pm-8pm							
8pm-9pm							
9pm-Bed							

Activity Planning

- Monitor your activities, and how they influence your mood using the weekly schedule.
- Focus on times of day when mood is generally low.
- Gradually increase the amount of things that you do by planning specific activities each day, especially around those times.
- Plan one day at a time. It is helpful to do this the night before and to plan activities on an hourly basis.
- Plan activities which usually give you pleasure or a sense of achievement, and also include increasingly difficult tasks.
- Break tasks down into small steps.
- Work towards getting back to the routine you used to enjoy before feeling depressed.
- Keep to your plan as much as possible but be flexible. If an activity is missed proceed to the next one.

What can I do??

- ❖ Talk to your GP
- ❖ Self-refer to local Talking Therapies Service
- ❖ Talk to your CNS – they may be able to refer you to a psychologist
- ❖ Talk to a trusted family member/friend
- ❖ Consider Samaritans as an option for telephone support
- ❖ Go to your local A & E if in crisis