



University of Brighton

MANAGING ANXIETY AND PANIC ATTACKS

CREATING A FRIENDLY, POSITIVE,

INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Student Wellbeing Team
www.brighton.ac.uk/wellbeing

HERE FOR
YOU



University of Brighton

+ Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal response to some situations such as before an exam or driving test or when confronted with a large snarling dog. In these situations the rapid increase in adrenalin results in a fast, loud heartbeat and racing thoughts. The body pumps blood to your muscles to enable you to 'fight or flee' which might enable you to scale that six-foot wall to get away from the dog.

When anxiety is being experienced on a regular or permanent basis without any obvious triggers, it can seriously affect your ability to get on with your life. Anxiety can be very frightening which can heighten and prolong the anxiety itself. The term 'panic attack' is commonly associated with this 'fight or flight' response and can be experienced out of the blue without any interim anxiety.

+ Panic attacks

Panic attacks can be extremely frightening and if you experience them you may fear having a heart attack, a stroke or that you may black out. You may experience shortness of breath, nausea, feel faint and feel your heart thumping in your chest. Panic attacks can leave you feeling quite ill for a few days after.

At least 30 per cent of the population experience unwanted episodes of anxiety and/or panic attacks at some time in their life. Symptoms can include:

- Being unable to relax and/or sleep
- Being unable to concentrate on work or conversations with people
- Not wanting to go out or not wanting to stay in
- Wanting to withdraw from people
- Irritable with family and friends
- A heightened sense of fear out of context with reality - feeling terrified
- Fear of dying from a heart attack, stroke or terminal illness
- Fear that you are going mad or losing control
- Headaches, pins and needles, rapid breathing, sweating, chest pains, nausea and/or diarrhoea.

What could help me?

Different people find different things helpful, so it's worth trying out all the help available until you find what suits you. You might want to:

- Talk to a friend you can trust - sharing your suffering can sometimes help.
- Contact your GP who can refer you for services available on the NHS.
- Join local self-help groups.
- Try reading some of the useful books listed in this leaflet.

- Relaxation - try and do things that you enjoy. This could be doing some exercise, watching a TV show, reading a book, baking a cake, having a bath - anything that you look forward to and will give you a break.
- Breathing - try some controlled breathing. Choose somewhere comfortable to sit. Breathe in for three seconds, hold your breath for two seconds and breathe out for six seconds. Repeating this a few times can help you to feel more relaxed.
- Distraction - try and take your mind off what you are experiencing. Try noting five things around you that you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. You can repeat this if needed.
- Talk to someone you can trust - this could be a friend, a housemate, a family member or anyone in your life. Sharing what you are experiencing can sometimes help.

+ Self-help organisations

Anxiety UK

Information on various anxiety disorders, plus opportunities to share your experiences.

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Tel 03444 775 774

First Steps to Freedom

Information and treatment for anxiety and panic attacks.

www.first-steps.org/

NHS self-help booklets

<http://www.nw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp>

A full list of support organisations that can help with many issues can be found at

www.brighton.ac.uk/wellbeingresources

+ Useful books

- Free Yourself from Anxiety: a self help guide to overcoming anxiety disorders, Emma Fletcher and Martha Langley
- Overcoming Social Anxiety and Shyness Self-help Course, Gillian Butler
- Essential Help for your Nerves: Recover from nervous fatigue and overcome stress and fear, Dr Claire Weekes
- Understanding Panic Attacks and Overcoming Fear, Roger Baker
- Instant Confidence (book and CD), Paul McKenna
- Overcoming Anxiety for Dummies: UK edition, Elaine Ilion Foreman, Charles H. Eliot PhD and Laura L. Smith PhD