

Fact Sheet: Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear and can be mild or severe.

Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life, for example, feeling worried and anxious about sitting an exam or having a medical test or job interview. Feeling anxious is sometimes perfectly normal. However, people with an anxiety disorder find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety are more constant and often affect their daily life.

When anxiety affects daily life in this way, it is called generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). This is a long-term condition which causes anxious feelings about a range of situations and issues rather than one specific thing.

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

People with GAD feel anxious most days and often struggle to remember the last time they felt relaxed. GAD can cause both psychological (mental) and physical symptoms. These vary from person to person, but can include feeling irritable or worried and having trouble concentrating or sleeping.

Some people have only one or two symptoms, while others have many more.

GAD can cause a change in your behaviour and the way you think and feel about things.

Psychological symptoms include:

- Restlessness and impatience
- a sense of dread
- feeling constantly "on edge"

- difficulty concentrating or being easily distracted
- irritability

While physical symptoms include:

- dizziness, headaches or nausea
- drowsiness and tiredness
- pins and needles
- irregular heartbeat (palpitations)
- muscle aches and tension
- dry mouth and shortness of breath
- excessive sweating and thirst
- stomach ache and/or diarrhoea
- frequent urinating
- painful or missed periods
- difficulty falling or staying asleep (insomnia)

A combination of these symptoms may cause withdrawal from family and friends to avoid feelings of worry and dread. Going to work can also be difficult and stressful resulting in time off sick. This can further reduce self-esteem.

How common is anxiety?

GAD affects about 1 in 20 adults in Britain. Slightly more women are affected than men, and the condition is most common in people in their 20s.

How is anxiety treated?

Several different treatments are available to ease the psychological and physical symptoms. These include psychological therapy and medication.

The individual circumstances will depend on which treatment or combination of treatments work best. Studies of different treatments for GAD have found that the benefits of psychological treatment last the longest, but no single treatment is best for everyone.

Before any treatment is started the GP will discuss all the treatment options including the pros and cons, any possible risks or side effects.

Often psychological treatment is often the first course of treatment in the form of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

There are a range of medication options which can help people with GAD. Depending on the symptoms, medicine to treat physical symptoms may also be required.

If a selection of treatments have been tried but there are still significant symptoms of GAD a referral may be made to a mental health specialist. This will usually be to a community mental health team. A member of the mental health team will carry out an assessment in order to devise a treatment plan.

There are also many things you can do to ease the symptoms of anxiety yourself.

Self help

There are things which can help to ease the symptoms of anxiety. For example:

- Exercise - particularly aerobic exercise, help combat stress and release tension. It also encourages your brain to release the chemical serotonin, which can improve your mood.
- Relaxation - learn how to relax, breathing exercises or activities like yoga or pilates can help.

- Smoking- if you smoke, try to give up, free help is available from the NHS.
- Support groups – these often provide useful advice about how to effectively manage anxiety. They are also a good way to meet other people with similar experiences.

More information:

No Panic - a voluntary charity for people who suffer from panic attacks and anxiety disorders. T: **0800 138 8889** from 10.00 am - 10.00 pm, everyday or visit www.nopanic.org.uk

Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust - the principal provider of mental health and learning disability services in Cornwall - www.cornwallfoundationtrust.nhs.uk

Outlook South West - providers of psychological therapies throughout Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly www.outlooksw.co.uk

The Royal College of Psychiatrists - the professional and educational body for psychiatrists in the United Kingdom www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Rethink Mental Illness - is a charity which helps people affected by mental illness. T: **0845 456 0455** Monday to Friday, between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm or visit www.rethink.org

Mind - provide advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem T: **0845 766 0163** Monday to Friday, between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm or visit www.mind.org.uk

NICE - produce best practice guidance visit www.nice.org.uk/CG22