

AWARE

**OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.**

**LETS TALK
ABOUT..**

**HELPING YOU
WITH ANXIETY**

Anxiety Alert.

Anxiety and stress are normal feelings, and when doing certain things like walking into a crowded room, going to an important meeting, or crossing a busy road, many people can feel anxious or stressed.

Some anxiety can be good. It helps us focus on what we are doing, or be alert to danger. However, when there is no reason for the anxiety, or, it becomes long-lasting or intense, it can start to interfere with our daily lives, and may be developing into an anxiety disorder.



Are You At Risk?

Ask yourself:

- Do you over-think or worry about future events?
- Did you go through a difficult childhood?
- Did your parents have high expectations, or were they over-critical of you?
- Do you find you are very wary or over-sensitive to situations?

Look Out For The Signs

Anxiety affects you in a variety of ways, but the symptoms can usually be grouped under four headings:

Thoughts - You may think things like 'something bad is going to happen', 'I won't be able to cope', or 'I feel bad, so it must be bad'

Feelings - Anxious, fearful, worried, nervous, restless, agitated

Behaviour - Avoiding certain people, places, situations; not going out; only going to places at certain times or only going with someone else or leaving early; increased use of alcohol or drugs.

Physical symptoms - Headaches, muscle and/or chest pain, sweating, tingling, numbness, shaking, dizziness, rapid or shallow breathing, rapid heartbeat or palpitations, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.

You are likely to be affected in a different way to others, and have more problems with certain symptoms.

Types of Anxiety Disorder

Generalised Anxiety Disorder

This is when you have overwhelming feelings of anxiety or worry more often than not for a period of six months or more. The worry is usually unfounded or exaggerated, and is about things that may go wrong, and not being able to cope when they do.

Panic Disorder

This is when you suffer from panic attacks. They come on quickly and symptoms are acute, especially hyperventilation (rapid breathing), rapid heartbeat and/or chest pain. As the symptoms are similar to a heart attack, it can cause the fear that you are dying. However, the attack usually eases within a few minutes.

Phobic Disorders

You may suffer from agoraphobia (avoidance of certain situations or places for fear of having a panic attack), a specific phobia (exaggerated or unfounded fear of certain things like spiders, flying, being closed in) or social phobia (fear of any situation where public scrutiny may be possible. You may believe that others think badly of you).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Acute Stress Disorder

After experiencing, witnessing or hearing about a distressing or disastrous event, you may suffer from one of these disorders. Acute Stress Disorder gets better within a month whereas PTSD lasts much longer.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

With OCD you have obsessive thoughts (most of these are about fear of harm or contamination) and, in an effort to reduce the anxiety caused by these, you carry out compulsive behaviours like excessive cleaning or hand washing.

Many symptoms are common to all disorders, and people with anxiety may not fit neatly into one particular type.

Depression and Anxiety

These commonly go hand in hand. When you are depressed you often worry about the future and have a mixture of anxiety and depression. If you have been experiencing high levels of anxiety over a long period of time, it may well lead to depression.



What Helps for Anxiety?

It is really important to see your GP if you think you are suffering from anxiety as he/she can not only advise on an appropriate course of action, but rule out other causes such as some medical conditions or side effects of certain prescription/non-prescription drugs.

Talking Therapies

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) has been proven to be effective for anxiety disorders in both the short and long term. It works on the basis that if we change our unhelpful thinking patterns and behaviour, it will improve how we feel.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness is another proven method of controlling anxiety. It is a way of paying attention to the present moment using meditation and breathing, and helps us become more aware of our thoughts and feelings so that instead of being overwhelmed by them, we're able to manage them better.



More Important Steps To Take Towards Recovery

- Avoid alcohol or keep it to a safe limit.
- Be physically active regularly.
- Maintain a regular sleep routine.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Reduce caffeine intake.
- Talk about it with someone you trust.
- Challenge your thinking - is it fact or opinion?

Medication

Your GP may prescribe a short course of anti-anxiety medication or tranquilisers to help in a crisis. However, these are addictive, and should be time-limited until more effective treatment is in place. Some of the modern day antidepressants are also very effective for certain types of anxiety, or when depression is also present.

The 5 most evidenced based steps to improving your mental health are:



1. Be Active - Exercise acts as an antidepressant. Research has shown that 50 minutes of brisk walking 4 times a week significantly reduces depression'.



2. Take Notice - Savour the moment, be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.



3. Give - Do something nice for a friend or stranger. Smile. Volunteer your time, or consider joining a community group.



4. Connect - With the people around you. Family, friends, or neighbours. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.



5. Keep learning - Do not be afraid to try something new. Rediscover an old hobby or interest or simply set a challenge you will enjoy.



Do One Thing

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed when taking steps to help yourself. But remember to focus on doing just one thing at a time. It will help you to reach the goals you set, and get a real sense of achievement.

Who to contact for support



Lifeline

Lifeline is a telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress or despair. It is available 24/7 and is free to call from your mobile phone.

They can give you immediate support, offer you a face-to-face appointment, or give you information about other services in your area. **Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.**

You could also

- **See your doctor**
- **Call the out-of-hours GP service**
- **Go to the A&E department**
- **Call emergency services on 999**
- **Call Samaritans on their freephone helpline 116 123.**

This is a confidential service that provides a listening ear to those in distress.

You can read our other guides for more information on help with depression, and looking after your mental health.

Find out how we can help and support you.
Please visit our website or contact us:

Visit: www.aware-ni.org.uk

Email: info@aware-ni.org

Call us: Belfast 028 9035 7820

Derry/L'Derry 028 7126 0602



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