



Information Sheet: Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety can sometimes feel like fear, and sometimes like worry. Whilst it can be a response to a particular trigger, the cause is often less clear. As such, it is different from [fear](#), which is usually an appropriate response to a perceived threat – often to physical well-being. Some people experience anxiety in the form of panic attacks, some in the form of phobias (fears of things that most people do not experience as frightening) and some as a generalised feeling. Often these three categories will overlap.

Both anxiety and fear are important for survival because they protect you from danger. They trigger the release of adrenalin (a hormone) which, in what is called the 'fight or flight' reaction, makes you breathe faster to send extra oxygen to your muscles for energy in case you need to fight or run away. However, when you are anxious but it's not appropriate to run away or fight, these hormones can build up and cause greater anxiety and other physical side-effects.

Sometimes anxiety can be useful. It can make you feel more alert. It is normal to feel anxious but we can become so anxious about things that it stops us doing what we want to do.

Symptoms:

These include excessive and chronic worry and tension; an unrealistic view of problems; restlessness or a feeling of being "edgy"; irritability; muscle tension; headaches; difficulty concentrating; nausea; the need to go to the toilet frequently; tiredness; trouble falling or staying asleep; trembling, and being easily startled. You might also have 'butterflies' in your stomach and be short of breath or 'catastrophise', always imagining a worst-case scenario.

As a result of the adrenalin surge, you might sweat excessively to prevent overheating. Your mouth might feel dry as your digestive system slows down to allow more blood to be pumped to your muscles. Once the danger has passed, other hormones are released which might make you shake as your muscles start to relax. All these symptoms can be tiring. In addition, you may be blaming yourself for what is going-on, which will probably make you feel worse.

How to help yourself:

You can control the symptoms of anxiety by using relaxation techniques, including breathing exercises. It also helps to think positive, peaceful thoughts or to visualise a favourite place. Moderate amounts of exercise can reduce anxiety and help you sleep better - exercise uses up adrenalin and produces other hormones that help your muscles to relax, releases chemicals in your brain which make you feel better.

Complementary therapies can also help you to relax. Yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, Bach flower remedies and hypnotherapy have helped people with anxiety. Some people also report benefits from homeopathy and herbalism.

How we can help:

CCL offers free counselling to people, aged 16 and over, living in Ryedale, or where appropriate, in Scarborough who are referred by their GP or by other NHS workers.

Other sources of information:

[nhs.uk/conditions/Anxiety](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Anxiety) has many useful links or find www.mind.org.uk and type 'anxiety' into their search box for more information.

Download our Information Sheets on relaxation and assertiveness techniques from our website.

Free Yourself from Anxiety: A Self-help Guide to Overcoming Anxiety Disorders by Emma Fletcher and Martha Langley (2009).