

MANAGING ANXIETY

Tips and information

Everyone experiences anxiety at some point in their lives. Anxiety is part of the human condition, it's as essential as breathing!

Hence the goal is not to get rid of anxiety, but rather to manage anxiety and to lessen its impact and disruption.

Why is this relevant to me?

The most recent National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found the following:

- ▶ 1 in 5 Australians aged 16–85 experience some form of common mental illness.
- ▶ Females experience higher rates of anxiety disorders, with 14.4% compared to males 10.8%.
- ▶ Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health issue in Australia affecting 14.4% of Australians in any year.
- ▶ For those aged 16–24 years, 1 in 4 Australians experience some form of common mental illness.

It is common when diagnosed with anxiety that depression may also be a feature of the experience. There is evidence from other National and University surveys that Australian tertiary students have a higher rate of psychological distress compared to their non-studying peers.

Anxiety is useful

Although anxiety can be an unpleasant state, it can be quite useful in helping people to detect threat and avoid dangerous situations (The Fight/Flight response).

Anxiety is useful to motivate the solving of every day problems and can be useful when you are challenged, assisting alertness, focus and concentration. So mild to moderate anxiety can be useful at times! However, anxiety can vary in severity and can significantly impact/disrupt daily functioning.

The impact of anxiety

Anxiety affects people in many ways including thinking, emotions/feelings, physiologically and behaviourally.

For example:

Thoughts – what if/catastrophic thinking about the worst possible scenario/worrying about the future/all-or-nothing thinking

Emotions/feelings – fear, anxiety, worry, mood disturbance

Physiological/body symptoms – sleep disturbance, appetite/gastrointestinal

Behaviour – avoidance/procrastination/substance use

It is useful to explore your own experience of anxiety and what may trigger your anxiety. If your anxiety is particularly distressing or you believe you have patterns of anxiety that resemble one or more of the anxiety disorders it would be useful to connect with the University Counselling Service or a health professional.

See the next page for helpful tips to assist with managing anxiety and its triggers.

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Tips and information

There are many actions you can take to minimise the impact of anxiety on your life. Read a few of these below.

1. Accept anxiety is a normal experience

Anxiety can alert us to potential threats and can assist us to meet challenges. It is our body's natural response to stress. Ask yourself if your anxiety is justified.

2. Identify your triggers and learn to manage them using coping skills

You may be able to do this alone or may need assistance from a counsellor/health professional.

3. Become aware of how you are breathing

Anxiety tends to make the breath short, rapid and shallow as though you are under threat. If you are not under threat, invite your breathing to become deeper and activate a physical sense of calm by trying coherent breathing – breathe in for a count of six and breathe out for a count of six. Regularly check how you are breathing.

4. Notice your thoughts and question them

Are they useful or helpful, or are they negative, rigid and critical creating deeper feelings of anxiety or worry? Are they facts or just opinions/fears? They may be about things outside your control.

Repetitive negative thinking and comparing yourself to others can make you highly anxious. It can be useful to ask yourself "What is the worst thing that can happen?" "What is the best thing that can happen?" "What is the most likely?" Health professionals and self-help resources assist with techniques to challenge thoughts (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and ways to approach/manage thoughts (Mindfulness).

5. Monitor/write out your thoughts or share your experience with someone you trust

Some find it helpful to externalise their thoughts as this can gain some perspective. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy self-help resources has tools to assist you to monitor your thoughts and notice the impact thoughts have on the way you feel.

It can be valuable to have an awareness of how to challenge unhelpful thoughts and to develop coping statements, in addition to other ways like Mindfulness, to manage unhelpful thoughts.

6. Learn to be present and calm

The mind is very busy and loves to wander and get distracted. The mind can ruminate about the past and/or worry about the future. Calming techniques such as mindfulness, learning to meditate, yoga and exercise can all assist you to manage anxiety and get good quality sleep (see [Sleep Matters tip sheet](#)).

Useful websites and apps

- ▶ [Griffith University Online Health and Wellness Centre](#)
- ▶ [Griffith University Counselling and Wellbeing](#)
- ▶ [Beyond Blue](#)
- ▶ [Reach Out](#)
- ▶ [Centre for Clinical Interventions](#)
- ▶ [Head Space](#)
- ▶ [SAM \(self-help for anxiety\)](#)
- ▶ [Breathe](#)
- ▶ [Smiling Mind](#)
- ▶ [My Compass](#)
- ▶ [Insight Timer](#).

