

Carers' Self Advocacy Toolkit

Dealing with anxiety



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A first step in dealing with anxiety is recognising that you experience anxiety. A second is being willing to make some changes in your life. It is also useful to be able to identify the things that trigger your anxiety and to work to change those things as much as possible. For example, if you know that you drink more than 6 cups of coffee a day, you can make steps to reduce your caffeine intake. As carers, there will be things that you can't change very much, such as broken sleep, being on call for large amounts of time and worries about the person you are caring for, so it's important to be realistic about how much you can alter. But there may be more things you can do to *manage* your anxiety.

Self Help

A good first option might be to look at some self-help materials available from your library, GP surgery, hospital or local carers centre. There are a number of online resources and organisations (see useful contacts below) that can help you learn more about your own anxiety and how you might be able to deal with it.

Medication

Several types of medication are available to treat anxiety. Your GP will be able to discuss medication with you. You can also find out a lot about medication from leaflets, websites and telephone helplines (see useful contacts below).

Talking Therapies

Talking therapy gives you the opportunity to discuss your anxiety with someone who is trained in this area and who you can speak to confidentially. They can help you face your anxieties and develop strategies to overcome or to at least manage your anxiety. You may be able to access counselling via your GP.

Taking time out

If you are feeling anxious, say during a meeting, try and take five minutes out to calm yourself and take a few deep breaths. Have a look at the relaxation techniques described below.

Relaxation Techniques

Whether you are in a review meeting for the person you are caring for, or are finding it tough going at home, using relaxation techniques can help you feel more in control and are useful in maintaining your long term health and well-being. To effectively combat stress and anxiety, you will need to activate the body's natural 'relaxation response'.

The relaxation response is when the body stops producing adrenalin. The heart rate slows down to a normal pace and breathing becomes normal. Muscles can relax and normal brain activity resumes, so we are able to think things through better, rather than focusing on fleeing or fighting. It's not possible for a person to be relaxed and tense at the same time so if you are feeling relaxed,

you probably won't be feeling high-level anxiety as well.

There is no single relaxation technique that suits everyone, so it is a matter of finding one that suits you and your routine. To find the right technique for you to prompt your 'relaxation response' you will need to be aware of how you respond to stress and anxiety.

How do you react to stressful situations?

Do you tend to become angry, agitated or keyed up?

You may respond best to relaxation techniques that quieten you down, such as meditation, deep breathing or guided imagery.

Do you tend to become depressed, withdrawn, or spaced-out?

You may respond best to relaxation techniques that are stimulating and that energize your nervous system, such as exercise.

Do you tend to freeze - speed up internally while slowing down externally?

Relaxation techniques that provide safety and stimulation may help you 're-boot'. Techniques such as mindfulness, walking or power yoga might work well for you.

Do you need time alone or time with others?

If you crave solitude, techniques like meditation or progressive muscle relaxation will help quiet your mind. If you like company, a yoga/relaxation class may be for you.

Meditation

Below are a few popular relaxation techniques for you to try out. For more techniques, visit your local library or call your carers centre. To get the most out of it, it's best to practice your relaxation technique as regularly as possible. If possible it's best to do it at a time when you won't be disturbed.

Breathing meditation

To control your breathing when you feel anxious:

- Place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach
- Repeat a helpful word like 'calm' or 'relax' out loud or in your head
- Breathe in through your nose using 1, 2,3 slowly
- Breathe out through your mouth counting 1,2,3
- Aim to do this for at least five minutes
- Keep your whole body relaxed while doing this
- It's a good idea to practice this when you are not feeling anxious as it does take a while before it will work in a situation of high anxiety

Deep muscular relaxation

Lie down or sit in an arm chair, your eyes open. Observe your breathing. When you feel settled clench your fists for a few seconds while you breathing in. Be aware of the tension in the hands. Then, when you breathe out, relax the hands and be aware of them relaxing and the blood circulating around. Work around your body (see below) tensing on the inbreath, being aware of the tension and then relaxing on the outbreath, noticing how it feels for that tension to have been released...

Arms	tighten biceps and lower arms together without the hands
Shoulders	raise your shoulders as if they could touch your ears
Neck	stretch your head up as if your chin could touch the ceiling
Neck (2)	bend your head forward until your chin reaches your chest
Chest	tighten all your chest muscles
Stomach	hold your stomach muscles in tight
Lower back	press the small of your back into the floor/the chair
Bottom	clench your buttocks together
Thighs	tighten the thighs while pressing your knees down onto the floor
Front of legs	point your foot away from you so that it is almost parallel with your leg

Back of legs	flex your feet upwards, stretching your heels down
Feet	screw up your toes
Mouth and Jaw	press your lips together and clench your teeth
Eyes	shut them tight
Head	raise your eyebrows as high as you can
Face	screw up all the muscles together

Guided imagery

Some people find that they still have anxiety in their minds even if they are physically relaxed. If this happens to you, make a list of places or situations that you find calming or relaxing and imagine that you are in one of these situations. Don't worry if the images keep changing. Just guide the images into calm waters and away from sources of trouble. For example, you could be imagining a calm spot on the banks of a river or another favourite place you have been to and felt relaxed in. If you find your mind wandering towards today's problems, gently bring your attention back to the river bank...

Mindfulness

Contact us for the Satellite on Mindfulness

Dealing with anxiety in practical ways

Let people know you have anxiety

So that they can understand you and help you keep calm, give you time to become calm.

Distraction

Thinking about the physical symptoms of anxiety will only make them worse. Sometimes, it may be useful to think about something else. Some techniques that might be helpful are; reading or talking to someone, mental games, such as counting backwards, or describing where you are to yourself in great detail.

Useful contacts

Anxiety UK – 08444 775 774

No Panic (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder OCD) – 0800 138 8889