Managing Anxiety and panic attacks

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal response to some situations e.g. before an exam or driving test or when confronted with a large snarling dog. In these situations the rapid increase in adrenalin results in a fast, loud heartbeat and racing thoughts. The body pumps blood to your muscles to enable you to ‘fight or flee’ which might enable you to scale that six-foot wall to get away from the dog. When anxiety is being experienced on a regular or permanent basis without any obvious triggers, it can seriously affect your ability to get on with your life. Anxiety can be very frightening which can heighten and prolong the anxiety itself. The term ‘panic attack’ is commonly associated with this ‘fight or flee’ response and can be experienced ‘out of the blue’ without any interim anxiety.

Panic attacks

Panic attacks can be extremely frightening and if you experience them you may fear having a heart attack, a stroke or that you may black out. You may experience shortness of breath, nausea, feel faint and feel your heart thumping in your chest. Panic attacks can leave you feeling quite ill for a few days after.

At least 30 per cent of the population experience unwanted episodes of anxiety and/or panic attacks at some time in their life. Symptoms can include:

- being unable to relax and/or sleep
- being unable to concentrate on work or conversations with people
- not wanting to go out or not wanting to stay in
- wanting to withdraw from people
- irritable with family and friends
- a heightened sense of fear out of context with reality – feeling terrified
- fear of dying from a heart attack, stroke or terminal illness
- fear that you are going mad or losing control
- headaches, pins and needles, rapid breathing, sweating, chest pains, nausea and/or diarrhoea.

What could help me?

Different people find different things helpful, either one thing or a combination so it’s worth trying out all the help available until you find what suits you.

- Book to see a University Counsellor to discuss your issues and explore options that might help you.
- Talk to a friend you can trust – sharing your suffering can sometimes help.
- Contact your GP who can refer you for services available on the NHS.
- Join local self-help groups.
- Try reading some of the books listed on the back of this leaflet.
- Do something: be active.
Self-help organisations

Anxiety UK
www.anxietyuk.org.uk
Tel: 08444 775 774
Website with new member resources, extended information on various anxiety disorders and additional opportunities to share your experience with anxiety.

First Steps to Freedom
www.first-steps.org
This website offers information and treatment for anxiety and panic attacks.

The Counselling and Wellbeing Service provides a range of self help information, useful contacts, apps and e books - www.brighton.ac.uk/current-students/advice-and-support/dealing-with-difficult-situations/index.aspx

Useful books

Free Yourself from Anxiety: a self help guide to overcoming anxiety disorders
Emma Fletcher and Martha Langley

Overcoming Social Anxiety and Shyness Self-help Course
Gillian Butler

Essential Help for your Nerves: Recover from nervous fatigue and overcome stress and fear
Dr Claire Weekes

Understanding Panic Attacks and Overcoming Fear
Roger Baker

Instant Confidence (book and CD)
Paul McKenna

Overcoming Anxiety for Dummies: UK edition
Elaine Ilion Foreman, Charles H. Eliot PhD and Laura L. Smith PhD

Counselling at the university

Counselling provides a safe, confidential environment for you to see an experienced counsellor and is available on all sites. More details about Counselling can be found at www.brighton.ac.uk/current-students/my-student-life/health-and-wellbeing/need-to-speak-to-someone/index.aspx or by email at counselling@brighton.ac.uk. Alternatively please contact or visit us at your site of study

Eastbourne:
Trevin Towers Student Centre, Eastbourne
01273 643845

Falmer:
Student Services, E Wing, Checkland Building
01273 643584

Grand Parade:
Student Centre, Ground Floor, main building 01273 643187

Hastings
Student Centre
First Floor, Room 108, Priory Square Building
01273 644643

Moulsecoomb:
The Manor House, Moulsecoomb Place
01273 642895

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