

Anxiety

This information aims to offer ways of coping with anxiety and of finding help from health professionals, local services or national organisations that are also concerned with this issue.

We all feel anxious or worried at certain times in our lives, and this is a normal emotional response to stress. For example, if you are worried about a hospital appointment, you may find it hard to concentrate, sleep badly the night before and become irritable with other people.

If the appointment goes well, the anxiety will usually go away. Anxiety can be useful in that it makes us more alert, but it can become a problem if we get so worried that it stops us coping from day to day. It's important to remember that there are a number of things we can do to help us cope with anxiety.

What happens in the body when we are anxious?

When faced with a threat, our bodies make physical changes, increasing the levels of the hormone adrenaline to help us fight the danger or escape from it. Muscles tense ready for action and the heart beat increases to carry blood to the muscles and brain. Breathing gets faster to provide more oxygen, sweating increases to stop the body overheating and the digestive system slows down, causing a dry mouth and a feeling of 'butterflies'. This is called the 'fight or flight' response.

We react in the same way to situations we can't fight or run away from, such as hearing bad news. We can also react in the same way when we remember threatening situations or worry about bad things happening in the future.

If the energy from this fight or flight response is not used up, we can find ourselves remaining mentally active and physically tense. This can cause headaches and discomfort in the shoulders, the neck and back. The disturbance to the digestive system can cause nausea and diarrhoea. We can also feel weak or dizzy because of breathing rapidly. Some people experience panic attacks which are a rapid build up of anxiety.

They describe feeling as if they are about to collapse or faint, having a racing heart, difficult or rapid breathing and feeling out of control. This can be very frightening, so the anxiety can feed on itself, increasing the feeling of panic.

What can help?

1. Talking - if possible, share your worries with your family and friends. You may find it helpful to talk with a counsellor or psychologist. They can help you understand your difficulties and support you in making changes. They can help you identify distressing thoughts and replace them with more helpful positive or alternative thoughts, which can help reduce your anxiety. This type of psychological therapy is known as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT.
2. Medication - talk with your G.P. or oncologist about your anxiety. They can assess whether medication may be of benefit in your situation.
3. Awareness - try to learn more about your anxiety. The more you understand, the less you will fear it. See the book list overleaf for books which may help. If you have concerns related to your illness or treatment, speak to the staff looking after you or to the staff at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC). They may be able to reassure you; sometimes what is imagined can be worse than the reality.
4. Relaxation - learn relaxation techniques. This can help control the fight or flight response by adjusting your breathing and relaxing your muscles and emptying your mind of distressing thoughts, replacing them with more peaceful ones. Relaxation classes are held at the LJMC Mon 2.30-4pm, Tues 10-11.30am & Thurs 11-12.30pm. Relaxation CDs can also be borrowed with a refundable deposit or purchased.
5. Lifestyle changes - try to reduce the unnecessary stress in your life and increase the opportunity for relaxation. What really must be done and what can be left? Can you delegate to others? If possible, and if your doctor approves, take some gentle exercise. This will help use up the adrenaline that is

produced under stress and will help to relax your muscles.

6. Support groups - it can be helpful to meet with others experiencing similar problems. A list of cancer support groups is available from the LJMC, also identifying other organisations. There are also support groups specifically for those suffering with anxiety (associated with any other issue medical or social). Within the options available, we hope you find appropriate help and support.

Contact	What they provide	How to contact
Your personal Macmillan or Specialist Nurse	Specialise in cancer care and give patients information and emotional support. This can be available within the patient's own home.	Name: Tel:
GP (Family Doctor)	Please call the surgery for details of individual surgery times, appointments and referrals. Many surgeries also now have counsellors.	Name: Tel:
Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) Mount Vernon Hospital Northwood Middlesex HA6 2RN	For patients & carers, information on cancer treatments & side-effects, & on any issue associated with cancer. Local / national support. Relaxation sessions. Counselling & complementary therapies available to cancer patients under the care of a Mount Vernon oncologist.	Helpline: 01923 844014 Drop-in centre. Mon - Fri 9.30am-1pm + 2pm-4.30pm (No referral needed) Answerphone out of hours www.ljmc.org
First Steps to Freedom PO BOX 476 Newquay TR7 1WQ	Offers practical help to those suffering from anxiety, panic attacks, phobias and obsessive compulsive disorder. Helpline, telephone self-help groups, one-to-one telephone support, leaflets, CDs, tapes and books.	Helpline: 0845 120 2916 (opt 1) Mon - Thurs: 10am - 10pm Fri - Sun: 10am - Midnight www.first-steps.org
MIND* PO BOX 277 Manchester M60 3XN	National charity offering a wide range of information on all mental illnesses. Produces booklets on coping with and understanding anxiety. Catalogue of helpful books.	Tel: 0845 7660163 www.mind.org.uk email: info@mind.org.uk
National Phobics Society Zion Community Centre 339 Stretford Rd, Hulme, Manchester M15 4ZY	Advice and support for people with anxiety disorders. Publishes factsheets. Self-help groups and newsletter for members.	Tel: 08444 775 774 9.15am - 9pm weekdays www.phobics-society.org.uk
No Panic 93 Brands Farm Way Randlay, Telford Shropshire TF3 2JQ	Provide information and support for people experiencing anxiety. Telephone support - one-to-one & groups, leaflets, videos, tapes and books.	Helpline: 0808 808 0545 10am - 10pm www.nopanic.org.uk
The Mental Health Foundation. 9th Floor, Sea Containers House, 20 Upper Ground. London SE1 9QB	Provide information for anyone affected by mental health problems, which also includes anxiety. Not a helpline.	Tel: 020 7803 1100 Mon - Fri: 9am - 5pm www.mhf.org.uk
Triumph over Phobia (TOP UK) PO Box 3760 Bath BA2 3YW	Network of self-help groups across the UK for people experiencing anxiety & phobias. Mon - Fri: 9am - 5pm	Tel: 0845 600 9601 www.topuk.org e: info@topuk.org

Book	Description	How to obtain
'Living With Fear' by Prof. I.M. Marks. (Published by McGraw-Hill)	Self-help for those suffering from anxiety and phobias.	Can order from Triumph Over Phobia (see above) or through local library
'Essential help for your Nerves' by Dr Claire Weekes. (Published by Thorsons)	Helps understand anxiety and creates a recovery programme to instil confidence and happiness.	Can order from MIND* (see above) or through local library
'Overcoming Anxiety' by Helen Kennerley. (Published by Robinson)	Based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), Gives help on overcoming a whole range of fears and anxieties.	Can order from MIND* (see above) or through local library
'Coping with Anxiety and Depression' by Shirley Trickett. (Published by Sheldon Press)	Explains how and why 'nerves' affect you and offers advice.	Can be ordered through MIND* (see above) or through local library Reference copy in the LJMC
Please note most books can now also be ordered through any major bookshop or via online booksellers		