



Coping with anxiety

This information offers ways to help you cope with anxiety and to find help from health professionals, local services or national organisations.

Many of us feel anxious or worried at certain times in our lives. 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 is 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 heartbeat 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.

Our bodies react in the same way to situations that we can't fight or run away from, such as hearing bad news. They can also react in the same way when remembering threatening situations or worrying about bad things that may happen in the future.

If the energy from this fight or flight response is not used up, our bodies can remain mentally active and physically tense. This can cause headaches and discomfort in the shoulders, the neck and back. The change to the digestive system can cause nausea and diarrhoea. Some people may also feel weak or dizzy because of breathing rapidly, or have panic attacks which are a rapid build up of anxiety. This may cause feelings as if you 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.

Tips for coping with anxiety

There are things you can do which you may find will help. These include:

- Talking and sharing your worries with family and friends.
- Talking with a counsellor or psychologist. They can help you understand your difficulties and support you in making changes and help you identify distressing thoughts and replace them with more helpful positive or other thoughts. This can help reduce your anxiety. This type of psychological therapy is known as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT.
- Talking to your GP or oncologist about your anxiety. They can assess whether medication may help you.
- Be aware and try to learn more about your anxiety. See the book list overleaf for books which may help. If you have concerns about 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.
- Learn to relax by learning relaxation techniques. This can help control the fight or flight response by changing your breathing, relaxing your muscles and emptying your mind of distressing thoughts and replacing them with peaceful ones.

Relaxation classes held at the LJMC:

Monday 2.30 - 4.00pm

Tuesday 10.00 - 11.30am

Thursday 11.00 -12.30pm

- These drop-in classes can help by providing simple ways to help relax the body and mind. Relaxation CDs can also be purchased.
- Make some lifestyle changes. These may help by reducing any unnecessary stress in your life and increase the chance to relax.

What really must be done and what can be left? Can you give some tasks to others? If you can 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.

- Join a support group. Some patients find it helpful to meet with others having similar problems. Please ask at the LJMC for details about local support groups. There are also support groups for those suffering with anxiety (from any cause).

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: _____
General Practitioner (GP)	This is your family doctor. Please call your surgery for details of appointments and referrals. Many surgeries also have counsellors.	Name: _____ Tel: _____
Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) Mount Vernon Hospital Northwood	Information on cancer treatments and side-effects, local/national support groups, relaxation sessions. Counselling and complementary therapies are available to cancer patients under the care of a Mount Vernon oncologist.	Helpline: 020 3826 2555 (Answerphone out of hours) Drop-in centre Mon - Fri: 9.30am - 4.30pm (No referral needed) www.ljmc.org
MIND	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: 0300 123 3393 www.mind.org.uk
AnxietyUK	Advice and support for people with anxiety disorders. Publishes factsheets. Self-help groups and newsletter for members.	Tel: 03444 775774 www.anxietyuk.org.uk
No Panic	National organisation providing information and support for people experiencing anxiety.	Helpline: 0844 967 4848 www.nopanic.org.uk
The Mental Health Foundation	Provides information for anyone affected by mental health problems, which includes anxiety. Not a helpline.	www.mentalhealth.org.uk
Triumph over Phobia (TOP UK)	Network of self-help therapy groups across the UK for people experiencing anxiety and phobias.	www.topuk.org

Book	Description
Living With Fear by Prof. I.M. Marks. (Published by McGraw-Hill)	Self-help for those suffering with anxiety and phobias.
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.
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.
Coping with Anxiety and Depression by Shirley Trickett. (Published by Sheldon Press)	Explains how and why 'nerves' affect you and offers advice.