Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the world, with one in thirteen people suffering from anxiety globally.

Anxiety is the intense and persistent worry or fear that is out of proportion to a situation, leaving an individual feeling overwhelmed and unable to control worrying. Stressful circumstances can increase anxiety, but people with an anxiety disorder will experience dread of everyday situations over a long period of time (at least six months).

The most common type of anxiety is called “Generalised Anxiety Disorder” (GAD), and people with GAD may catastrophise or anticipate disaster and be overly concerned about everyday issues such as: money, health, family, and work.

Anxiety comes in many shapes and sizes. The most common forms are: General Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder (panic attacks), Specific Phobias (i.e. spiders, tight spaces), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, PTSD, and Social Anxiety.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal problems
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety
RISK FACTORS

- Personal or family history of anxiety
- Ongoing or historic traumatic events, especially if they are unprocessed
- Cumulative stress build-up such as: a chronic health condition, workplace stress, financial worries, abusive relationships
- Having other mental health disorders. Depression is common partner to anxiety
- Certain personality traits. Some people are more prone to experience anxiety due to personality characteristics including perfectionism or need for orderliness.
- Alcohol and drugs can cause or worsen anxiety

WHAT MAKES IT WORSE

Anxiety can be made worse if you are...

- Working in a fractured team with unhealthy workplace relationships
- Experiencing rapid and unexpected change
- Socially isolated
- Unwilling to seek support when needed
- Exposed to any new fear-inducing situation that overwhelms your perceived ability to cope

WHAT HELPS

Acknowledge and accept anxious thoughts

This can involve:

- Avoiding or fighting them gives anxiety more strength.
- Catch the anxious thought and welcome it.
- Remember that thoughts are not facts. Ask yourself if the thought is helpful or unhelpful. Thank yourself for the thought and gently let the unhelpful thoughts continue by.
- Take a nice long breath and bring your full attention to that breath. Try it again.
- Remember that feelings will pass as they have before.
- Gently shift your attention towards what’s next or try one of the activities below.

Seek out some positive distraction

- Try one the following engaging activities:
  - A rigorous workout or group sport
  - Cooking a nice meal with friends
  - Reading a captivating book or watching a movie
  - Anything that gives you control and immediate satisfaction: gardening, cleaning, easy work tasks.
  - Get outside and pay attention to what’s happening out there. Can you hear birds? Feel the wind? Research is definitive, green and blue space both have a significant impact on psychological recovery.
Consider the utility of your anxiety
Many of our clients live and work in insecure parts of the world, or areas of high crime rates. If this applies to you, then staying vigilant is the responsible thing to do. However, our advice is to limit the amount of time spent under high stress or worry. We know that the longer you spend in fear/anxiety the more reinforced it becomes. In the brain and body, anxiety becomes the ‘most travelled route’; the default response to life in general, and it becomes more difficult to get back to baseline.

Stop smoking, cut back on alcohol and caffeine intake

Do not discontinue prescribed medication while deployed abroad

Experiment with relaxation techniques
This might be listening to a mindfulness app such as Headspace or Calm. Or it may look like prayer, meditation, or yoga.

Get some quick wins by setting some small and achievable goals

Practice self-compassion and kindness
Self-critical thoughts cause more distress. Consider reducing your personal expectations if you are going through a time of anxiety.

Speak to a doctor or a mental health professional if…
- Your worrying is impacting your work, relationships or other parts of your daily life
- You are escaping anxiety with drugs or alcohol
- If you are feeling depressed or thinking about suicide. If you have strong feelings of hurting yourself or someone else seek help immediately.

Consider the possibility that your anxiety may not go away on its own; and remember that it’s easier to treat if you get help early. Treatments for anxiety are very effective. They may include: counselling, medication, applied relaxation, among others. Several modalities are effective for anxiety with the most common being Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).
FURTHER SUPPORT

We can offer you or a member of your team a range of psychosocial services including:

Counselling
A safe space with a trained therapist for anyone struggling through personal issues: www.thrive-worldwide.org/service/counselling

Coaching
One-on-one expert support to help you set new goals and take steps towards them: www.thrive-worldwide.org/service/coaching

Managing Anxiety and Stress
Spot signs of anxiety and stress in your team and learn how best to respond: https://thrive-worldwide.org/service/managing-anxiety-and-stress

Managing Your Perfectionism
Learn to overcome perfectionist tendencies to preserve your wellbeing and relationships: https://thrive-worldwide.org/service/managing-your-perfectionism

Learn more at www.thrive-worldwide.org/services. Or book an appointment by emailing info@thrive-worldwide.org

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Want to talk?

We’re ready to support you

thrive-worldwide.org/contact-us