ANXIETY MANAGEMENT PACKAGE

ANXIETY

- Overview
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Your anxiety
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INTERVENTIONS

- Coping skills
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ANXIETY

Anxiety is the body's way of responding to being in danger. Adrenaline is rushed into our bloodstream to enable us to run away or fight. This happens whether the danger is real, or whether we believe the danger is there when actually there is none. It is the body's alarm and survival mechanism. Primitive man wouldn't have survived for long without this life-saving response. It works so well, that it often kicks in when it's not needed - when the danger is in our heads rather than in reality. We think we're in danger, so that's enough to trigger the system to go, go, go! People who get anxious tend to get into scanning mode - where they're constantly on the lookout for danger, hyper-alert to any of the signals, and make it more likely that the alarm system will be activated.

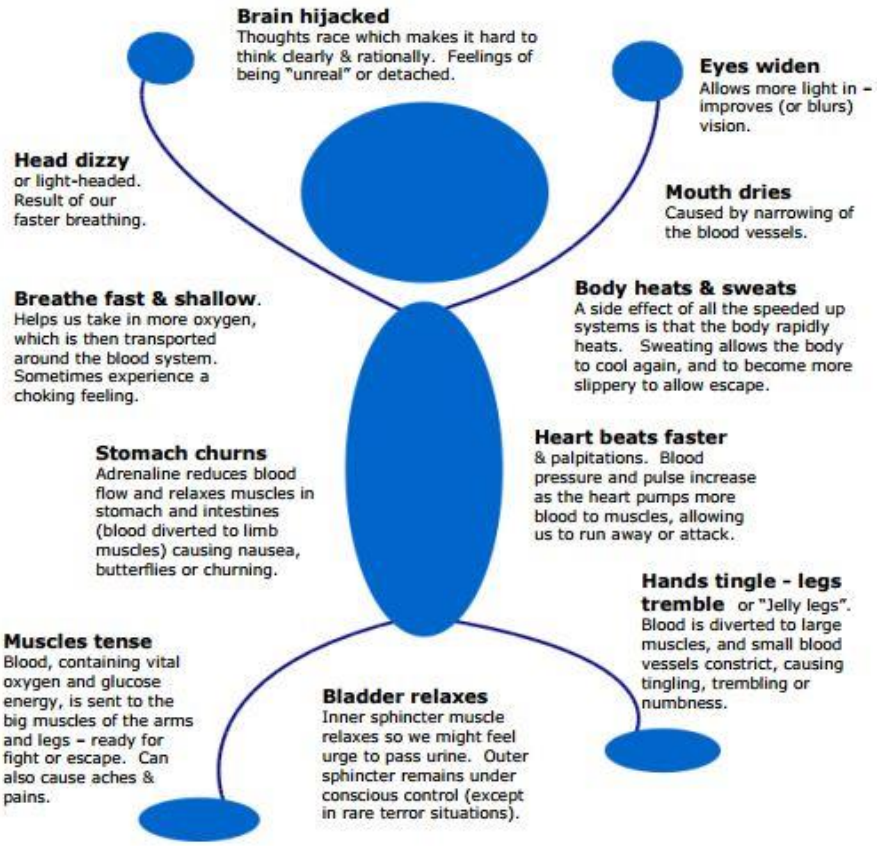
Thoughts that often occur relate to our overestimating or exaggerating the actual threat and underestimating or minimising our ability to cope:

- I'm in danger right now
- The worst possible scenario is going to happen
- I won't be able to cope with it

ALARMING ADRENALINE !

The body's alarm system

When the brain perceives a threat, it activates the body's "fight or flight" alarm system, and adrenaline is released into the blood from the adrenal glands. We experience uncomfortable feelings because the adrenaline makes the body systems speed up, diverting blood towards the big muscles, preparing us to attack (anger) or escape (anxiety).



After the adrenaline has died down, we can feel exhausted, shaky and weak.

Behaviours might include:

- Avoiding people or places
- Not going out
- Going to certain places at certain times, e.g. shopping at smaller shops, at less busy times
- Only going with someone else
- Escape, leave early
- Go to the feared situation, but use coping behaviours to get you through: examples include: self talk, holding a drink, smoking more, fiddling with clothes or handbag, avoiding eye contact with others, having an escape plan, medication. These are called 'safety behaviours'.

Safety behaviours can also help to keep your anxiety going. Whilst you depend on them to help you cope, you don't get to find out that without them, the anxiety would reduce and go away on its own.

Whilst avoiding people or situations might help you feel better at that time, it doesn't make your anxiety any better over a longer period. If you're frightened that your anxiety will make you pass out or vomit in the supermarket aisle, you won't find out that won't actually happen, because you don't go. So the belief that it will happen remains, along with the anxiety.

Vicious Cycle of Anxiety

We all feel anxious some times. A certain amount of anxiety helps us to be more alert and focused. For example just prior to an exam, a few exam nerves have a positive effect - motivating us, helping us focus our thoughts on the job in hand, making us more alert. Too much anxiety, or constantly being anxious, is unhealthy and detrimental to our lives and relationships.

Vicious Cogs of Anxiety

By looking at the "cogs" that keep the central problem going, we can target and make positive changes in each of the cogs, which will at least, slow down, and at best, stop, the central problem, for example:

Print a blank Cogs PDF (www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/Cogs.pdf) and fill in the factors that keep your anxiety going

Identify your triggers

What or when are the times when you are more likely to get anxious? If you can see the patterns, then maybe you can do something about those situations, and do something different.

- Certain places?
- Certain people?
- Anytime, anyplace?
- See certain things?
- Hear certain things?
- Think ahead to certain situation?

Doing things differently

If avoiding situations and using safety behaviours helps to maintain our anxiety over the long-term, then it makes sense that learning to confront it might be uncomfortable in the short-term, but will help us take control and helps us feel better over time.

Make a plan to gradually do the things you normally avoid. For instance if you normally avoid going out to big social events at work, then start with a small dinner at a restaurant where you feel more comfortable, with few close colleagues - not the annual Christmas party! Whilst it will feel uncomfortable, you will learn that you can enjoy these events, and that the anxious feeling does go away.

If you have a fear of particular types of places (e.g. lifts), then you could start by listing different particular places (smaller, bigger lifts, taller, smaller buildings, glass walls or enclosed etc). You could start by standing next to a lift for a couple of minutes each day for a couple of weeks, then slowly build up to standing in the doorway with the doors open, then to getting in the lift without

the doors closing, then to letting the doors close before opening them again, then to going up one floor etc. You can use breathing techniques or self-talk (challenging your unhelpful thoughts and repeating more realistic thoughts) to get you through these times.

If you normally depend on 'safety behaviours' to help you cope, then list them in order of importance, then start by dropping or not doing the least important, and gradually work your way up over time.

What to do when you feel anxious

- **STOPP!** Pause, take a breath, don't react automatically *(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm)*
- Ask yourself:
  - What am I reacting to?
  - What is it that I think is going to happen here?
  - What's the worst (and best) that could happen? What's most likely to happen?
  - Am I getting things out of proportion?
  - How important is this really? How important will it be in 6 months time?
  - Am I overestimating the danger?
  - Am I underestimating my ability to cope?
  - Am I mind-reading what others might be thinking?
  - Am I believing I can predict the future?
  - Is there another way of looking at this? Is this fact or opinion?
  - What advice would I give someone else in this situation?
  - Am I putting more pressure on myself?
    - Just because I **feel** bad, doesn't mean things really **are** bad.
  - What do I want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise?
  - What would be the consequences of responding the way I usually do?
  - Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (for me, for the situation, for others)
  - Visualise yourself coping in the situation you feel anxious about. See the situation to a successful completion.

How to deal with the physical sensations of anxiety

Counteract the body's adrenaline response - it's readiness for action, by using that energy healthily.

- Practice calming or mindful breathing - this one act alone will help reduce the physical sensations, emotions and intensity of thoughts. *(www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm)*
- Visualisation: Breathe in blue (for calm), breathe out red
- Exercise - Go for a walk, run or cycle, or do some gardening or housework.

what is generalised anxiety?

Feeling tense, stressed, and worried at certain times when under pressure is a normal human response. In fact 2 out of every 5 people report that they worry at least once every day. However, for some people their worry, feelings of anxiety and tension persists to the point that they significantly interfere with their daily life. If this sounds like you, then you may find the information in this sheet very helpful in understanding what generalised anxiety is and its relevance to you.

What is Worry?

Before you can understand generalised anxiety, you need to have an understanding of worry. Worry is generally regarded as a form of verbal mental problem solving about potentially negative future events. It can be triggered by a variety of external events, or from thoughts that just pop into your head. Worry is characterised by a lot of "what if" statements such as:

"What if I fail my exam?"
"What if I can't do the job?"
"What if I can't provide for my family?"
"What if I get anxious during my interview?"

Normal worry is relatively short-lived and leads to positive problem-solving behaviour. Worry becomes unhelpful when it is about a number of things, is very frequent, and is difficult to control or dismiss. People may think this type of worry is useful, that it helps with problem solving and planning, or prevents future negative outcomes. However, this is not the case, as prolonged or frequent worry generates more anxiety and more worry, which may actually prevent positive thinking and action.

What are the key symptoms?

Generalised anxiety involves:

- ***Anxiety or worry about several things*** has occurred for at least the past 6-months
- The worry is experienced as excessive and uncontrollable, is present most days, and interferes with the ability to focus on tasks.

At least 3 of the following symptoms also need to be present for the past 6-months or longer:

- ***Feeling restless***, keyed up, on edge & unable to relax
- ***Physical tension***.
- ***Sleep disturbance***. Having trouble falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or experiencing unsettled sleep.
- ***Problems concentrating*** and focusing on a task.
- ***Feeling irritable***.
- ***Feeling tired*** or exhausted easily.

What are the causes?

The causes of generalised anxiety are not clearly understood. However, a number of vulnerabilities are considered to increase the chance of developing generalised anxiety:

- An inherited general biological disposition to experience negative emotions.
- Prolonged stress, and past experiences of uncontrollable or traumatic events.
- Direct or indirect messages from the people around you that the world is threatening or that worry is useful.
- A coping style that involves avoiding challenges or situations where there is the chance of experiencing negative emotions.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Generalised anxiety is not always easy to diagnose as some of its symptoms overlap with depression and other anxiety problems. It is thus important to see a mental health practitioner for a definite diagnosis.

The recommended psychological treatment for generalised anxiety is cognitive-behaviour therapy. This usually includes: relaxation to reduce chronic tension; techniques for dealing with unhelpful beliefs about worry; learning to challenge and let go of worries; learning more helpful coping and problem solving strategies; and learning to be less focused on uncertainty, and more present focused.

Mindfulness training and meditation may also be helpful for some individuals to reduce worry and increase present moment focus. However more research is required to determine if it is as effective as cognitive-behaviour therapy.

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Introduction to Anxiety

Anxiety is the body's response to situations that are interpreted as threatening. Without any anxiety, you would probably make bad decisions, such as driving too fast on the highway, or not paying your bills. However, too much anxiety can lead to avoidance or unpleasant physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms.

What are three things that trigger your anxiety?

1.

2.

3.

What are three physical symptoms that you experience when you feel anxious?

1.

2.

3.

What are three thoughts you tend to have when you feel anxious?

1.

2.

3.

What are three things you do to cope when you are anxious?

1.

2.

3.

biology + psychology of panic

Panic attacks (the key feature of Panic Disorder) can be seen as a blend of biological, emotional & psychological reactions. The emotional response is purely fear. The biological & psychological reactions are described in more detail below.

Biological Reactions 1: Fight or Flight

When there is real danger, or when we believe there is danger, our bodies go through a series of changes called the fight/flight response. Basically, our bodies are designed to physically respond when we believe a threat exists, in case we need to either run away, or stand and fight. Some of these changes are:

- an increase in heart rate and strength of heart beat. This enables blood and oxygen to be pumped around the body faster.
- an increase in the rate and depth of breathing. This maintains oxygen and carbon dioxide levels.
- an increase in sweating. This causes the body to become more slippery, making it harder for a predator to grab, and also cooling the body.
- muscle tension in preparation for fight/flight. This results in subjective feelings of tension, sometimes resulting in aches and pains and trembling and shaking.

When we become anxious and afraid in situations where there is no real danger, our body sets off an automatic biological "alarm". However, in this case it has set off a "false alarm", because there is no danger to 'fight' or run from.

Biological Reactions 2: Hyperventilation & Anxious Breathing

When we breathe in we obtain oxygen that can then be used by the body, and we breathe out to expel the product of our metabolic processes - carbon dioxide. The body naturally maintains optimal levels of both oxygen and carbon dioxide. When we are anxious, the optimal level of carbon dioxide is disrupted because we begin to hyperventilate, or breathe too much. If the body cannot return carbon dioxide levels to the optimal range, we experience further symptoms such as dizziness, light-headedness, headache, weakness and tingling in the extremities, and muscle stiffness. For people with panic, these physiological sensations can be quite distressing, as they may be perceived as being a sign of an oncoming attack, or something dangerous such as a heart attack. However these are largely related to the fight or flight response and overbreathing, not physical problems.

Psychological Reactions 1: Thinking Associated with Panic

We've described the physical symptoms of panic. People who panic are very good at noticing these symptoms. They constantly scan their bodies for these symptoms. This scanning for internal sensations becomes an automatic habit. Once they have noticed the symptoms they are often interpreted as signs of danger. This can result in people thinking that there is something wrong with them, that they must be going crazy or losing control or that they are going to die.

There are a number of types of thinking that often occur during panic, including:

- Catastrophic thoughts about normal or anxious physical sensations (eg "My heart skipped a beat - I must be having a heart attack!")
- Over-estimating the chance that they will have a panic attack (eg "I'll definitely have a panic attack if I catch the bus to work")
- Over-estimating the cost of having a panic attack: thinking that the consequences of having a panic attack will be very serious or very negative.

Psychological Reactions 2: Behaviours that Keep Panic Going

When we feel anxious or expect to feel anxious, we often act in some way to control our anxiety. One way you may do this is by keeping away from situations where you might panic. This is called avoidance, and can include:

- Situations where you've had panic attacks in the past
- Situations from which it is difficult to escape, or where it might be difficult to get help, such as public transport, shopping centres, driving in peak hour traffic
- Situations or activities which might result in similar sensations, such as physical activity, drinking coffee, having sex, emotional activities such getting angry

A second response may be to behave differently, or to use "safety behaviours". The following are examples of these; you might make sure you are near an escape route, carry medication with you, or ensure that you are next to a wall to lean on. Or you may use other more subtle methods like trying to distract yourself from your anxiety by seeking reassurance, reading something, or bringing music to listen to. Although this may not seem harmful to begin with, if you become dependent on these behaviours you can become even more distressed if one day it's not possible to use them.

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What are Panic Attacks?

Panic attacks are brief periods of overwhelming fear or anxiety. The intensity of a panic attack goes well beyond normal anxiety, and can include a number of physical symptoms. During panic attacks, people often fear that they are having a heart attack, they cannot breathe, or they are dying.

Symptoms of a Panic Attack

Note: A panic attack does not need to include all of the symptoms listed below.

- ✓ Pounding or racing heart
- ✓ Sweating
- ✓ Trembling or shaking
- ✓ Fear of "going crazy"
- ✓ Feeling of being detached from reality
- ✓ Breathing difficulties
- ✓ Sense of terror, or impending doom or death
- ✓ Chest pain or discomfort
- ✓ Nausea
- ✓ Fear of dying

Panic Attack Facts

- Panic attacks may feel scary, but they don't actually cause physical harm. The most common fears associated with panic attacks (having a heart attack or fainting) are not actually a threat.
- Panic attacks are usually brief but intense. The symptoms of panic typically peak within 10 minutes, and end within 30 minutes. However, some lingering symptoms can last over an hour.
- Panic attacks can seem to occur randomly, or they can be closely linked to a specific source of anxiety such as driving, crowded places, or simply leaving home.
- Panic *disorder* occurs when a person has frequent worry or fear of future panic attacks, or when they change their behavior in to avoid attacks (such as avoiding a feared situation).

How are Panic Attacks Treated?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a common and well-supported treatment for panic attacks and panic disorder. CBT works by identifying and changing unhealthy thinking patterns that trigger panic attacks. The benefits of CBT can be long-lasting.

Exposure Therapy

During exposure therapy, the patient is intentionally exposed to the symptoms of panic in a safe environment. As exposure continues, the symptoms become more familiar and less terrifying. Exposure therapy may also involve gradual exposure to feared situations.

Medication

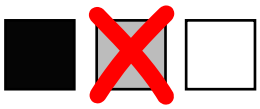
Medication for panic attacks can act as a short-term treatment for severe cases. Because medication does not treat the underlying issues that cause panic disorders, it should be accompanied by another form of treatment such as psychotherapy.

Relaxation Techniques

Much like how muscles become stronger with exercise, the body's relaxation response can be improved with practice. Frequent use of relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation can help to combat panic attacks.

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

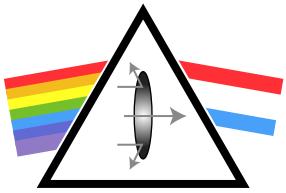
If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

Over-generalising

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

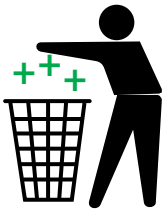
Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

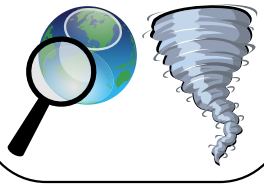
That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions

There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

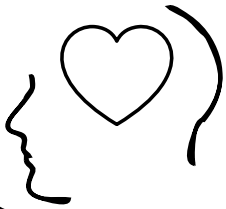
- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling

Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot

Personalisation

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

TEN WAYS TO UNTWIST YOUR THINKING*

1. **Counter the Distortion**: Write down your negative thoughts so you can see which of the cognitive distortions you're involved in. This will make it easier to think about the problem in a more positive and realistic way.
2. **Examine the Evidence**: Instead of assuming that your negative thought is true, examine the actual evidence for it. For example, if you feel that you never do anything right, you could list several things you have done successfully.
3. **The Double-Standard Method**: Instead of putting yourself down in a harsh, condemning way, talk to yourself in the same compassionate way you would talk to a friend with a similar problem.
4. **The Experimental Technique**: Do an experiment to test the validity of your negative thoughts. For example, if, during an episode of panic, you become terrified that you're about to die of a heat attack, you could jog or run up and down several flights of stairs. This will prove that your heart is healthy and strong.
5. **Thinking in Shades of Gray**: Although this method might sound drab, the effects can be illuminating. Instead of thinking about your problems in all-or-nothing extremes, evaluate things on a range from 1 to 100. When things don't work out as well as you hoped, think about the experience as a partial success rather than a complete failure. See what you can learn from the situation.
6. **The Survey Method**: Ask people questions to find out if your thoughts and attitudes are realistic. For example, if you believe that public speaking anxiety is abnormal and shameful, ask several friends if they ever felt nervous before they gave a talk.
7. **Define Terms**: When you label yourself "inferior" or "a fool" or "a loser", ask "What is the definition of 'a fool'?" You will feel better when you see that there is no such thing as "a fool" or "a loser".
8. **The Semantic Method**: Simply substitute language that is less colorful and emotionally loaded. This method is helpful for "should statements". Instead of telling yourself "I shouldn't have made that mistake", you can say, "It would be better if I hadn't made that mistake."
9. **Re-attribution**: Instead of automatically assuming that you are "bad" and blaming yourself entirely for a problem, think about the many factors that may have contributed to it. Focus on solving the problem instead of using up all your energy blaming yourself and feeling guilty.
10. **Cost-Benefit Analysis**: List the advantages and disadvantages of a feeling (like getting angry when your plane is late), a negative thought (like "no matter how hard I try, I always screw up"), or a behavior pattern (like overeating and lying around in bed when you're depressed). You can also use the Cost-Benefit Analysis to modify a self-defeating belief such as "I must always try to be perfect".

Challenging Anxious Thoughts

Anxiety can be a healthy emotion—it forces us to focus on our problems, and work hard to solve them. But sometimes, anxiety grows out of control, and does just the opposite. It *cripples* our ability to solve problems. When this happens, **irrational thoughts** often play a role.

In this exercise, we will practice catching our irrational thoughts, and replacing them with rational alternatives. With enough practice, this will become a natural process that can help you manage anxiety.

Describe a common situation that triggers your anxiety:
example: "giving a speech in front of a crowd" or "driving in rush hour traffic"

Anxiety distorts our thinking by causing us to **overestimate the likelihood of something going wrong**, and **imagine the potential consequences as worse than they really are**. Sometimes, just taking a moment to think about these facts can help us recognize our irrational thoughts.

Imagine you are faced with the anxiety-producing situation from above. Describe the…

Worst outcome:
Best outcome:
Likely outcome:

Imagine the worst outcome comes true. Would it still matter…

1 week from now:
1 month from now:
1 year from now:

Usually, anxious thoughts focus on the worst possible outcomes, even when they aren't likely. For example, a person who is nervous about giving a speech might think: *"I am going to forget everything and embarrass myself, and I'll never live it down"*.

As an outside observer, we know that an alternate, more rational thought might be: *"My speech might only be OK, but if I do mess up, everyone will forget about it soon enough"*.

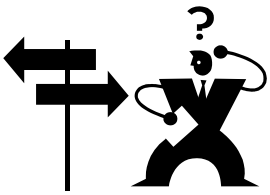
Using your own "worst outcome" and "likely outcome" from above, describe your…

Irrational thought:
Rational thought:

accepting uncertainty

The inability to tolerate uncertainty is an **attitude** many people have towards life. When one has this attitude, uncertainty, unpredictability, and doubt are seen as awful and unbearable experiences that must be avoided at all costs.

If you hate uncertainty, then you may perceive worrying to be useful to you. You may think that worrying is a way of preparing yourself for the worst – getting you ready for anything that might happen. Worrying might be seen as a way of attempting to predict life so that there are no nasty surprises. As such, worrying reduces your experience of uncertainty and unpredictability. And because worrying reduces your feelings of uncertainty, you will continue worrying and worrying and worrying. In other words, worrying helps you believe that you have more control and certainty in life.



In reality, has your worrying made anything more certain or more predictable? Does worrying really change the outcome of what will happen? Unfortunately, life is still as uncertain and unpredictable as it ever was, it is only your perception that you somehow have more control that has changed. But is this really true? In fact, all you have done is think of all the worst case scenarios, worked yourself up, made yourself feel really bad in the process and often paralysed yourself from taking any action. So, ask yourself, is worrying about uncertainty really worth it? Maybe it is time to consider a different way?

There are two main strategies for learning how to accept uncertainty and thus reduce worry.

1. Challenging Intolerance of Uncertainy

Ask yourself the following questions and write down your responses. See if you can come to an understanding of the disadvantages and problems of being intolerant of uncertainty.

- Is it possible to be certain about everything in life?
- What are the advantages of requiring certainty, versus the disadvantages? Or, how is needing certainty in life helpful and unhelpful?
- Do you tend to predict bad things will happen just because they are uncertain? Is this a reasonable thing to do? What is the likelihood of positive or neutral outcomes?
- How likely is it that things you predict will happen? Is it possible to live with the small chance that something negative may happen, given its likelihood is very low?
- Can you live with some of the uncertainties of life? How do you do this? And can you do this in other situations you find diffiult?
- Ask a friend how they cope with uncertainty, see if you can learn a few tips from them?

2. Acceptance and Mindfulness

When you are intolerant of uncertainty, your mind tends to be focused on the future. An antidote to this style of thinking is to practice becoming more present focused and accepting of your current experience. That is, more mindful. The steps to being more accepting and mindful are explained in the infosheets *What is Mindfulness?* and *Mindfulness & Letting Go.* Three basic steps to follow are:

- ***Being aware*** of what you are currently thinking and what you are feeling in your body. Use the feeling of your breath to remain present. What are you noticing when you are needing certainty? Acknowledge these thoughts and feelings, maybe saying "ah, so that's how it is".
- ***Letting go*** of the need for a quick fix, by saying something to help you let go of the need for certainty. Maybe "its only a need for certainty thought, just let it go".

- ***Being Non-judgmental***, by bringing a gentle curiosity to the thoughts that drift by without judging them or trying to change them. Then return your focus to the here and now of your experience. Focus your attention fully on sounds around your or sensations in the body, or your breath, or the task at hand.

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how worry works

Worry and Problematic Worry

Worry is generally regarded as a form of verbal mental problem solving about potentially negative future events. Normal worry is generally short-lived and leads to positive problem-solving behaviour. Worry becomes unhelpful when it is about a number of things, is very frequent, and is difficult to control or dismiss. Prolonged or frequent worry generates more anxiety and more worry, which may actually prevent positive thinking and action.

What Triggers Worry?

Worrying can be triggered by various things. Some triggers may be more obvious and linked to external things, for example:

- Seeing a certain image (e.g. in the newspaper or on TV)
- Hearing certain information (e.g., on the radio or in a conversation)
- Being put in a certain situation (e.g., having to make decisions, perform a task, lead others, or face uncertainty)

Some triggers may be less obvious. These may be thoughts or images that seem to just pop into your head out of the blue. An initial "What if…" question that comes to mind for no apparent reason, can even be a trigger for worrying. For example, the thought "What if I left the iron on?" might pop into my head. If I think "I probably didn't" and decide not to worry about it, chances are I will forget about it, and the thought will slip my mind. However, if instead I start to 'chase' the thought further (e.g., "The ironing board might catch fire and that will spread to the whole house." "The house might burn down and then I will lose everything!"), then the original "What if…" question has now triggered a worry episode.

What Maintains Worry?

People who describe themselves as chronic worriers are often disturbed that they seem to spend much of their waking hours worrying excessively about a number of different life circumstances. They do not understand why this activity continues. They often ask, "Why do I do it?" and "What keeps my worrying going?"

There are two types of thoughts or beliefs about worry which work to maintain the worry, in a vicious cycle. These are negative beliefs about worrying, and positive beliefs about worrying. Unhelpful strategies such as avoidance and thought control also maintain worry.

Negative Beliefs About Worrying

In addition to the specific things people worry about, people with generalised anxiety disorder may also **worry about the fact that they are worrying**. In this case, such worriers are often concerned that worrying is "bad" and may believe that:

- Worrying is **uncontrollable**, and will take over and result in a loss of control (e.g., "I won't be able to control my worrying, and it will never stop").
- Worrying is **dangerous**, and will cause either physical or mental harm (e.g., "If I keep worrying like this I will go crazy/ have a breakdown/become ill").

Holding these (false) negative beliefs about worrying makes the process of worrying very distressing for you, and this will even keep your worrying going.

Positive Beliefs About Worrying

Worriers often hold (false) positive beliefs that worrying is beneficial and "good," which can keep worriers worrying. Some positive beliefs may be:

- Worrying **motivates** me to do things
- Worrying helps me find **solutions** to problems
- Worrying **prepares** me for the worst
- Worrying helps me **avoid** bad things
- Worrying **prevents** bad things

Avoidance and Thought Control

Avoidance may take the form of avoiding a feared outcome (e.g., passing up a promotion to avoid the feared outcome of not doing a good job) or avoiding worrying itself (e.g., not watching the TV news in case a worry is triggered, or asking for reassurance from loved ones that nothing bad will happen to you). Avoidance limits a person's opportunity to have experiences that disconfirm their worries and their beliefs about worrying. IN a sense, not confronting your worries keeps the worrying going.

People who worry often attempt unsuccessfully to control their worrisome thoughts in a number of ways. These may include trying to suppress their worries, trying to reason with their worrisome thoughts, distracting themselves or thinking positively. These attempts at thought-control rarely work, as trying to suppress a thought usually has the opposite effect of making that thought occur more, which in turn fuels the belief that worries are uncontrollable.

In other information sheets, we can explore some better strategies to manage worry.

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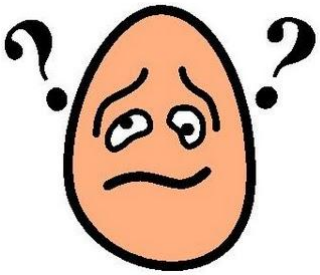
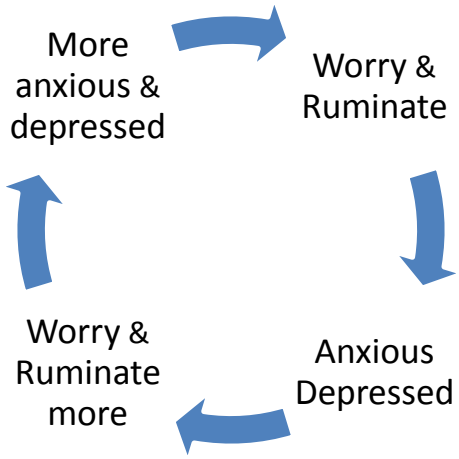
Rumination & Worry

- **Worry**
  - Future focused – danger and our own inability to cope
  - Leads to: anxiety, stress, fear
    - What if?
    - Imagining the worst will happen
- **Rumination**
  - Past focused – loss and personal failings
  - Leads to: depression, sadness, shame
    - If only
    - Regret. I should have…., I shouldn't have…



Thinking style

- Similar to what we do in 'problem solving' – but in overdrive!
- Constantly chewing things over, regurgitating. Repeatedly thinking about the same thing. Circular thinking patterns.
- Thoughts keep returning - difficult to get out of the thinking habit.

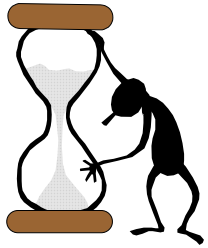


How does it affect us?

- In ruminating and worrying, we're trying to reduce the distress and overcome problems, but we end up increasing and prolonging our distress, and making the problem bigger.
- Interferes with clear thinking, daily activity, our ability to cope.
- Often leads to unhelpful behaviours to help us escape from our thoughts (self-harm, drinking, drugs, comfort eating etc)
- The more we ruminate or worry, the stronger the habit becomes, and the harder it is to change. The less we ruminate or worry, the weaker the habit becomes.

What can I do?

- Notice that the mind is going down that rumination/worry route
- Tell yourself:
  - I don't have to think about that right now. It can wait until I feel stronger.
  - There's nothing I can do about my thoughts – I can't stop them, but I can choose not to focus on them.
- Do something that will take up your attention and help you feel better
  - What can I do right now, that will help me feel better, and be effective for this situation?
  - Right now, what can I do that will take me one step in the right direction?



Postpone your Worry

This approach involves postponing your worry to a 'worry period' that is the same time, place, and duration each day. It is important to practice this approach as it will take some time to develop your skill and gain some benefits. It may be best to start by practicing with minor concerns before moving onto major worries. Read the information sheet ***Postpone your Worry*** before tackling this exercise.

What was the worry ? (Did you notice any triggers, such as places, times or events linked to your worry?	**Were you able to postpone the worry?** (How did you cope?)	**What happened in the worry period?** (Did you still need to worry? Did you use problem solving, a thought diary, or mindfulness? How did it work? What feelings or reactions did you notice?)	**What did you learn from postponing your worry?** (Was the worry more or less bothersome after you postponed it? Could you control your worry? How did you feel after the worry period?)

Basic steps:

1) As soon as you become aware of a worry, postpone it to your worry period.

2) Briefly write down the topic of your worry and any triggers on the sheet so you can refer to it later.

3) Use mindfulness to focus on the present moment and the activities of the day to help let go of the worry until your worry period. Then decide what is the most important and best thing you can practically do for yourself right now. Take immediate action to do something that is either practical, positive, or nurturing.

4) When your 'worry period' arrives, use it for problem-solving or thought diary work on only the worries from the day that still bother you.

5) Complete the sheet and make any comments about what you noticed about the process of postponing your worry.

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Worry Thought Record

Situation Date & Time	What is my worrisome thought?	What am I predicting? (Rate how much you believe it will happen 0-100%)	Emotion (Rate intensity 0-100%)	What is the evidence for my prediction?	What is the evidence against my prediction?	How likely is it that what I am predicting will happen? (Rate belief 0-100%)

Problem Solving: Reality-Checking

Practicing reality-checking and exploring whether a worry is likely or not likely is an important life skill. Children, adolescents and young adults in particular all need to develop this skill. Anyone who has an anxious brain will often struggle with keeping perspective and can benefit from strengthening this capacity.

Situation: *What is happening?*	*I had to open several doors.*
Thoughts / Beliefs: ***Scale Your Worry:***	*My hands are dirty. I need to wash them.* ***7***
Check the Evidence: *What tells you this worry or thought may be true? What tells you that it might not be?*	*I have a healthy immune system to fight germs.* *I have often touched doors and not gotten sick.*
Realistic View: *what is a balanced way to look at it?* ***Scale Your Worry:***	*Even if there are germs my body can fight them.* *I can wash my hands before I eat dinner.* ***4***

Adapted from Rapee (2008)

This strategy needs lots of practice to become a pattern in thinking. As a helper you can support this by talking many situations through using the chart, encouraging and using your attuned presence, and asking questions like the following to help check evidence:

- *What else might happen? What has happened other times?*
- *Are you trying to read other people's minds? Are you trying to control things you don't have control over?*
- *If you can imagine 2 weeks (months, years...) down the road, how do you feel or think about this?*
- *If this were your friend, what would you say to them?*
- *Is there other information you need before you can reach a conclusion?*

Problem Solving: Worrying Well

Of course life is full of stressors and changes, so it makes good sense that a person does worry about them. Remember anxiety is adaptive when there is a real stressor. People need skills then to come up with a plan for when they face a real worry.

Situation: *What is happening?*	*My family is going through a divorce.*
Thoughts / Beliefs:	*I'm scared that relationships are going to be lost.*
Scale Your Worry:	***9***
Check the Evidence:	*I have seen this happen with many of my friends.*
What tells you this worry or thought may be true? What tells you that it might not be?	*I already feel and notice changes in people.*
What Can't I Control?	*I can't stop the divorce from happening.*
What Do I Have Control Over?	*I can choose to communicate; ask questions.*
What Steps Can I Take?	*I can talk to my lawyer about my options.*
What Information Do I Need?	*I can write a letter to the people I want to keep working on the relationship with.*
What Support Do I Need?	*I can spend time with my friends who are outside of this situation for some "down" time and they care about me.*
Scale Your Worry:	***4***

For those who persistently worry, using these worksheets often can be important. Part of the practice is then to only work on them at agreed times. This can become another thought interruption strategy: *I will tackle that at 4:00 when I work on my worry worksheets.*

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

See Appendix pages 50 and 51 for blank charts.

Social Anxiety

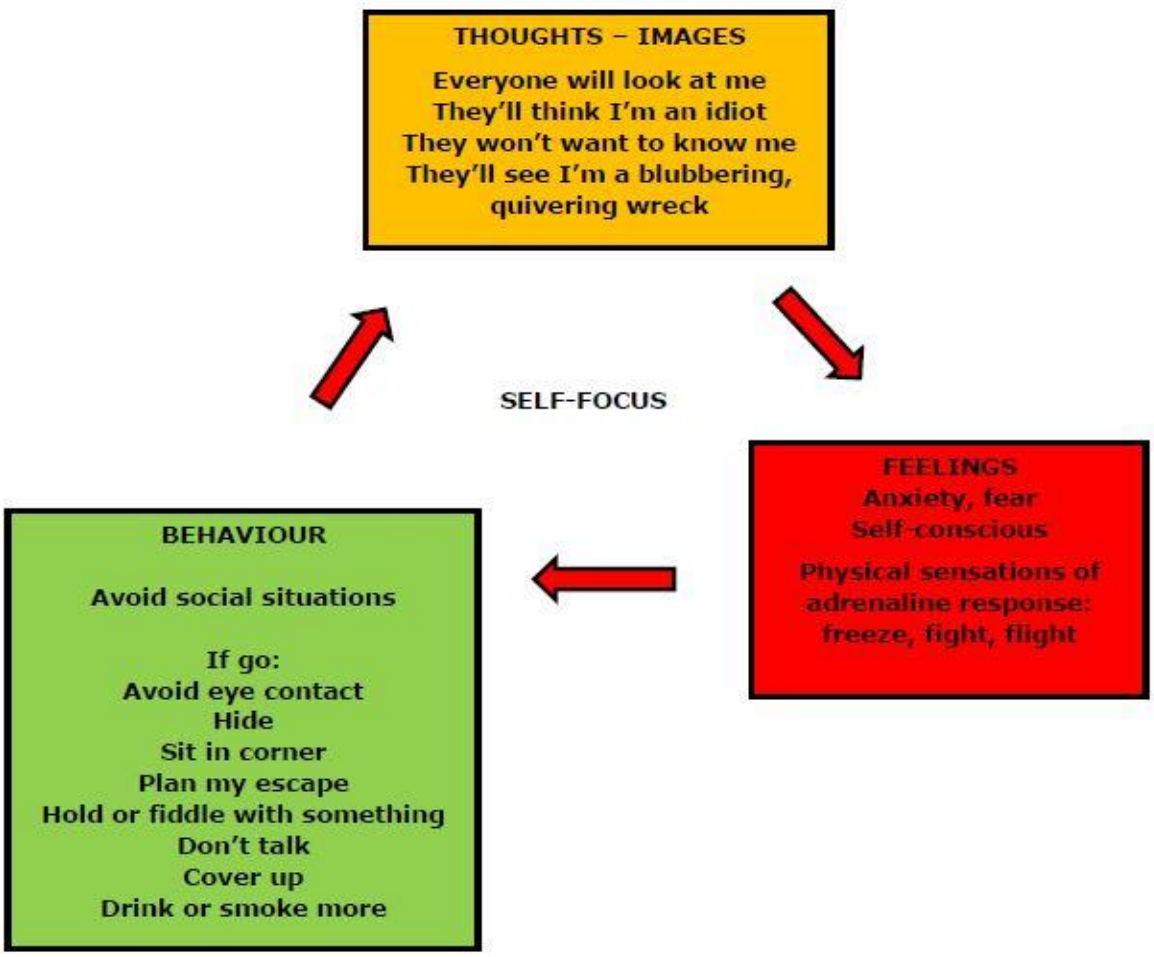
Social Anxiety is an anxiety disorder where we believe that others will judge us negatively (e.g. "they'll think I'm an idiot"), and it is therefore experienced most acutely in situations when we are with other people. Our attention is very self-focussed - on what we must look like to others, what they might be thinking of us, trying to interpret every glance or other unspoken gesture or expression and what it might say about what they think about us. We become 'mind-readers' and imagine that we can correctly assume what others are thinking about us.

Because we don't want to experience this anxiety (and it's normal body response), we tend to avoid situations when it might happen, and therefore are unlikely to learn that it could be ok and we could actually enjoy ourselves.

If we do have to go, then we use 'safety behaviours' to help us cope, such as trying not to be noticed, avoiding eye contact, holding or fiddling with something, trying to hide (e.g. sit in corner, hair over face), don't talk, and maybe have an escape plan (e.g. sit by door or in aisle, make excuse to leave early). This all increases the self-focus.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy helps us learn to challenge the unhelpful thoughts and beliefs, learn to control our focus of attention, and change what we do.

Example of a vicious cycle of Social Anxiety



Self Help for Social Anxiety

In order to break the vicious cycle of social anxiety, we need to change the way we think, and change what we do. Firstly, we can learn about how any anxiety affects our body:

- Read **Alarming Adrenaline**

Thinking Differently - Challenging Thoughts

If we can change the way we think about a situation, then we will not feel so anxious. We can learn to challenge those anxiety-provoking thoughts. Thoughts are not statements of fact. Don't believe everything you think!

- Learn more **About Automatic Thoughts**
- Learn **Fact or Opinion** skill
- Learn about **The Mind Bully**

What we believe deep down about ourselves, influences and distorts the way we think other people will think about us. Just because we **think** others think negatively about us, doesn't mean that is how it **really** is! We are looking at social situations, at other people and their judgement of us, through those very distorted lenses.

- Read: **Different Perspectives**

Learn to challenge the unhelpful and distorted thinking:

- Use the **Vicious Cycle & Alternatives** to map out your own thoughts, feeling and behaviours, and generate some healthier alternative thoughts and behaviours.
- Use this **Social Anxiety Thought Record Sheet**
- Practise **STOPP** skill
- Learn to use **Positive Coping Statements**

Thinking Differently: Re-Focus

When we're in a social situation with a group of people, our focus of attention becomes totally caught up in our own thoughts and feelings. We see everyone around us, but all we can think about is how they might be thinking critically about us! The adrenaline response of anxiety makes us feel terrible too, so we're thinking about how horrible that is, and how we just want to escape the situation.

It is very helpful to learn how to change our focus of attention and take more control over how we react to thoughts. We can learn to just notice the thoughts, acknowledge them, then let them pass. Notice the **Mind Bully** and let it go - turn your focus of attention to something else. First of all, you might learn to focus on your breathing.

- Practise **Mindful Breathing**

Mindfulness of everyday activity

- Choose an activity to do mindfully throughout the day, for one, two or five minutes. For example: Drink a cup of tea. Walk. Wash the dishes.
- Be in that moment, right now. See, hear, smell, touch, feel, breathe.
- Simply notice whenever other thoughts and sensations come to mind, then re-focus on your chosen mindful activity.
- Be patient and compassionate with yourself.
- Describe… rather than judge good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant.
- It is as it is.

Use the **NOW** acronym for mindful moments during the day

- **N**otice where your attention is right now
- **O**bserve what you are doing: "I am sitting", "I am looking", "I am breathing"
- **W**ise Mind: What shall I do now? Continue being mindful? Do something else?

See the Mindfulness handout for more examples

The more we practice, perhaps the more, initially at least, we will notice those thoughts intruding, and that's ok. The only aim of mindful activity is to continually bring our attention back to the activity, noticing those sensations, from outside and within us.

Doing Differently

Our usual strategy for dealing with social anxiety, is to avoid social situations. However, that just serves to keep the social anxiety going because we never find out that we could cope and that we could enjoy ourselves.

Use the **Avoidance worksheet** to gradually face your fears.

In the vicious cycle example diagram above, you will notice a list of what are called "safety behaviours" that we might use when we feel anxious in a social situation. It's helpful to identify what you do in those situations, such as: plan your exit (book a taxi), sit in a corner (to hide), sit on the end (to allow quick exit), check where the exits or toilets are, fiddle with something, drink more, not talk, avoid eye contact and so on.

Slowly, we can change what we do. Use the **Avoidance worksheet** and identify some healthy coping strategies to use in those situations, and gradually, reduce and stop those safety behaviours. So part of your list of feared situations might be changing where you sit, who you sit by, not booking a taxi etc.

It's important that you see the situations through - stick with the anxiety - it will pass.

Use STOPP skill to incorporate the strategies

STOP

- Just pause for a moment

Take a breath

- One slow deep breath

Observe

- There's the mind bully again.
- My body and mind are reacting to the thoughts that others might be critical and I feel anxious.

Pull back

- This is just the anxiety talking.
- The thoughts are just thoughts.
- Don't believe everything you think!
- Let's stick with the facts - these thoughts are just opinions (**Fact or Opinion**).
- I don't have to react right now.
- There's another explanation for this...(there is no evidence that others are thinking critically of me, my friends wouldn't invite me if they didn't want me there, others won't even notice me etc)
- I can let the thoughts go.

Practise / Proceed - What can I do right now? I can use my coping strategies, e.g.

- **Avoidance Worksheet**
- **Social Anxiety Thought Record Sheet**
- **Mindful Breathing**
- **Shift focus -** Where can I put my focus of attention right now? (**Mindfulness & mindful activity**).
- What else can I do that would help me tolerate these thoughts and feelings without reacting to them?

Complete your own **STOPP Worksheet**

Social Anxiety - Thought Record Sheet

Situation & Trigger	**Feelings: Emotion/s** Rate 0 – 100% **Physical sensations**	**Unhelpful thoughts or images**	**Self-focus**	**Safety Behaviours**	**Balanced more rational response to thoughts and self-focus**	**Outcome** What I did – how that helped. Re-rate Emotion 0-100%
What happened? Where? When? Who with? How? *What did I notice? What did I react to?*	*What emotion did I feel at that time? What else? How intense was it?* *When I felt anxious, what did I notice in my body? Where did I feel it?*	*What went through my mind? What disturbed me?* *What's the worst that could happen?* *What did I think others would notice or think about me?* *What would that mean to me, or say about me?*	*As I felt anxious, where was my focus of attention?* *What did I notice about myself?* *What do I imagine I look like, or how others see me? How do I picture myself looking?*	*What did I do that helped me cope?* *What did I do to hide it or prevent others from noticing?* *What did I do to try to stop it happening?* *Did I have an urge to do anything?* *How did what I did affect my anxiety?*	*STOPP! Take a breath….* *Is this fact or opinion?* *What would someone else say about this situation? What's the bigger picture?* *Is there another way of seeing it? What advice would I give a friend?* *Is my reaction in proportion?* *If I was seeing this as an outsider, what would I notice about other people? What's REALLY happening?* *Change focus!*	*What could I do differently? What would be more effective?* *Outer-focus: look around, listen – move focus of attention away from self* *Do what works! Act wisely.* *What would be most helpful for me or best for the situation? What will the consequences be? (long and short term)*