



# Anxiety

*The Pocket Guide on  
How to Manage and  
Live with Anxiety*

# | Anxiety



Anxiety is one of the most common mental health issues in nearly every country in the world. Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their lives, and it is normal to experience anxiety in everyday situations. A low level of anxiety can be a useful motivating force. However, persistent and excessive anxiety can be distressing and may point towards a more serious issue.

This booklet explores ...

What  
anxiety is

How it  
affects us

What to do  
if you are  
experiencing  
anxiety

## What is anxiety?

The word ‘anxiety’ tends to be used to describe worry, or when fear is nagging and persists over time.

Anxiety is a type of fear usually associated with a perceived threat or something going wrong in the future, but it can also arise from something happening right now. Unlike fear itself, which is a response to an immediate danger, anxiety is an ongoing sense of worry, sometimes without a specific cause. Anxiety happens when you become overwhelmed by fear and want to avoid situations that might make you anxious. It can be hard to break this cycle, but there are lots of positive ways to cope so it doesn’t stop you from living a full life.

It is important to be able to recognise the different forms of anxiety and how they can affect you, as well as adopting positive coping strategies. Around 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health difficulty like anxiety. Seeking help is often the first step in learning how to cope.

*Anxiety happens when you become overwhelmed by fear and want to avoid situations that might make you anxious.*

## Understanding what makes you anxious

Feelings of anxiety can be caused by lots of things and vary according to what you’re worried about and how you act when you feel apprehensive. Understanding these things can be the first steps to managing anxiety.





## Life Events

A variety of factors may have contributed to the distress you are experiencing now. Your genes, how you were brought up, what's happened to you in your life, and the way you learn and cope with things might all affect you. In addition, relationships, loneliness, ageing, health and medication can be causes of anxiety. In the same way that your journey has been unique, your recovery journey will be too.

## Work

Mental Health Ireland's 2018 Mental Health Insights Survey found that the majority of Irish people feel they maintain a good work-life balance.

However, work was the most commonly cited aspect impacting on mental health and wellbeing (Mental Health Ireland, 2018). Feeling unhappy about the amount of time you spend at work and neglecting other aspects of life because of work may increase your vulnerability to anxiety.

## Money

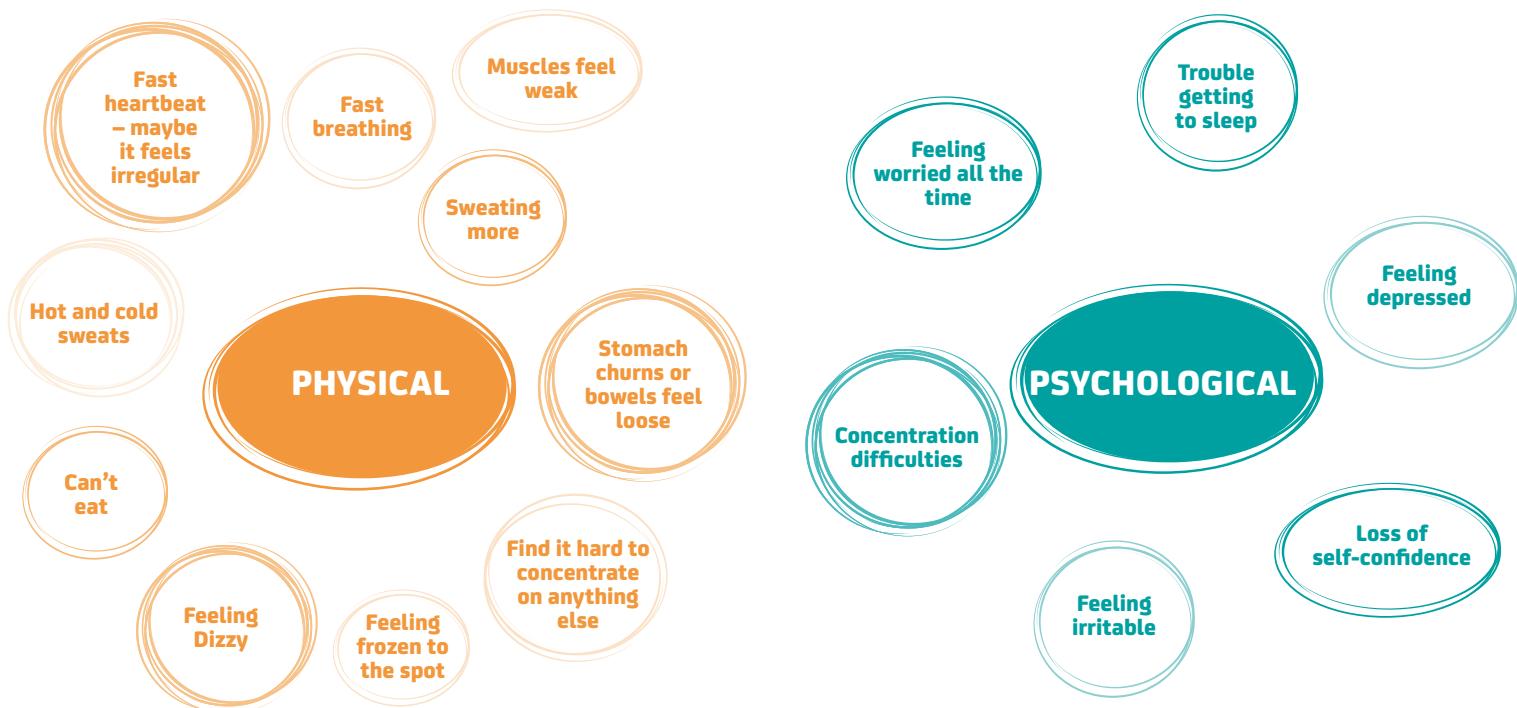
Concerns about money and debt can cause worry and anxiety.

There is support available to help you gain control of your financial situation. Citizen Information and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) have information on ways to support people who are in debt. Please find more information at [www.mabs.ie](http://www.mabs.ie)

## What does anxiety feel like?

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Anxiety feels different for everyone, and although symptoms can be frightening they can be managed. Some common symptoms are listed below.





These feelings can be scary – especially if you are experiencing them and you don't know why, or if they seem out of proportion to the situation. They happen because your body, sensing fear, is preparing you for an emergency. In doing this, your body makes your blood flow to the muscles, increases blood sugar to prepare you for a threat. It can be hard to break this cycle, but you can learn to cope with your anxiety so it doesn't stop you enjoying life.

There are many different types of anxiety each with their own characteristics.

- A panic attack is when you feel overwhelmed by the physical and mental feelings of fear. People who have panic attacks say that they find it hard to breathe, and can experience a pounding heart, chest pains or feel faint.
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is the most commonly diagnosed anxiety disorder and usually affects young adults. While feelings of anxiety are normal, people with GAD find it hard to control them to an extent that limits their daily life.
- A phobia is an intense and irrational fear of a specific object or situation which makes the person experiencing it go to great lengths to avoid it.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is a reaction to highly stressful or traumatising events. People commonly experience flashbacks, panic attacks, nightmares or avoid situations that might trigger memories of the event.
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorders (OCD) are characterised by unwanted, intrusive, or repetitive feelings that make the individual feel driven to do something to get rid of the obsessive thoughts.

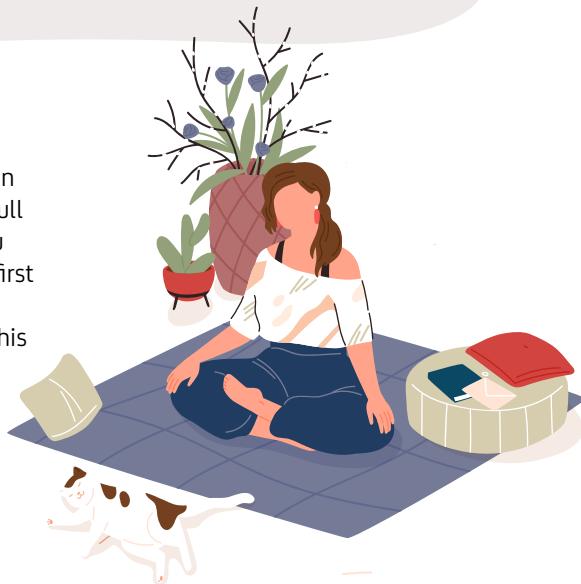
See the support section at the end of this booklet if you need help with any of these types of anxiety.

## Managing Anxiety

Many people get through passing moments of anxiety with no lasting effects, but for some it can be helpful to seek some additional guidance and support.

Anxiety can be an everyday, long-lasting concern - even if you can't put your finger on why. Some people feel a constant sense of anxiety all the time, without any particular trigger. Simple remedies may help you to cope if you are experiencing anxiety.

Remind yourself that anxiety is incredibly common, and people can and do return to living full and contented lives. You have already taken the first step on your journey to recovery by picking up this leaflet. Help is available.



## Some helpful strategies to consider

### Talking it through

Although you might feel embarrassed or afraid to discuss your feelings with others, it can be helpful to talk.

Talking with friends, family, work colleagues or someone who has had a similar experience can help you to feel supported.

### Learning about yourself

Try to learn more about your anxiety, as learning is empowering. Keep an anxiety diary to note down when it happens and what symptoms you experience.

You can try setting yourself small, achievable goals for facing your fears. You could carry with you a list of things that help at times when you are likely to become anxious. This can be an effective way of recognising and addressing the underlying issues that can trigger your anxiety.



## Face your fear, if you can

Although this may seem like the last thing you want to do, patterns of avoidance can make anxiety worse. If you always avoid situations that scare you, you might stop doing things you want or need to do. With support, you can work out how to face your fears which will reduce your anxiety in the long term.

## Relaxation techniques

Simple relaxation techniques can help you with the mental and physical feelings of fear. It can help if you just drop your shoulders and breathe deeply, or imagine yourself in a relaxing place. Practices like yoga, meditation or mindfulness will relax your breathing and help you manage the way you feel about stressful experiences.

## Exercise

Even small increases in physical activity levels can trigger brain chemicals that improve your mood, well-being and stress levels.

This can act as a prevention and treatment for anxiety as well as lead to improved self-esteem and self-worth.

## Healthy eating

There is growing evidence that suggests what we eat positively affects our mood and mental wellbeing.

Very sweet foods cause an initial sugar 'rush', followed by a sharp dip in blood sugar levels which can give you anxious feelings. Caffeine can also increase anxiety levels so try to avoid drinking too much tea or coffee. Substituting caffeine with water can help keep the body well hydrated.



## Alcohol consumption

It's very common for people to drink alcohol when they feel nervous to numb their anxiety. However, the effect that alcohol has on how you feel is only temporary. When alcohol wears off you can feel worse, potentially more anxious, and your brain might be less able to deal with anxiety naturally.

Learn more about alcohol, the recommended limits and the effects of alcohol at the Ask About Alcohol Campaign -

[www.askaboutalcohol.ie](http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie)

## Faith/spirituality

Many people find it helpful to focus on their faith or spiritual life at a stressful time or when feeling anxious. Faith can provide a way of coping with everyday stress. Attending church and other faith groups can connect you with a valuable support network. Similarly, getting out into nature can provide meaning and clarity.



## Seeking help

If you feel anxious all the time, for several weeks or if it feels like your anxiety is taking over your life, then it's a good idea to ask for help or contact one of the websites or numbers listed in this booklet.

The first step is to visit your GP who will be able to guide you on a range of helpful options available. It may be difficult, but asking for help is a sign of strength and can make a real difference.

## Counselling & Talking Therapies

Counselling or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, can be very effective for people with anxiety.

Remember that your recovery journey will be unique, so it is important to find a talking therapy that suits you. Visit your GP to find out more.

## Medication

Medication is used to provide short-term help, rather than understanding the cause of your anxiety.

Medication can be most helpful when it is used in combination with other treatments or supports. Visit your GP to find out more.

## Support groups

You can learn a lot about managing anxiety from asking other people who have experienced it. Local support groups or self-help groups bring together people with similar experiences so that they can hear each other's stories, share tips and encourage each other to try out new ways to manage anxiety. Your GP will have details on support groups near you.

## Seeking help

Your GP should be your first point of contact. If in distress or out of office hours you can contact your local A & E department.

### Samaritans Ireland

116 123  
[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### Your Mental Health

[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)

### Aware

1800 804 848  
[supportmail@aware.ie](mailto:supportmail@aware.ie)  
[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

### Grow

1890 474 474  
[info@grow.ie](mailto:info@grow.ie)  
[www.grow.ie](http://www.grow.ie)

### Childline

1800 666 666  
[www.childline.ie](http://www.childline.ie)

## Specialist mental health services

There are a number of specialist services that provide various treatments, including counselling, and other programmes. Often these different services are coordinated by a Community Mental Health Team (CMHT), which is usually based either at a hospital or a local community HSE centre. You can contact your local CMHT through your local HSE office.

**HSE Live** - Guidance and support for navigating the Irish public health system. **1850 24 1850** | 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday and 10am - 5pm on Saturdays. | [hselive@hse.ie](mailto:hselive@hse.ie)

For a list of registered counsellors and psychotherapists contact:

Irish Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy [www.iacp.ie](http://www.iacp.ie)

Irish Council for Psychotherapy [www.psychotherapycouncil.ie](http://www.psychotherapycouncil.ie)



Take some time to learn about the Five Ways to Wellbeing

## The Five Ways to Wellbeing

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are simple, evidence based actions, you can do everyday to feel good and function well (NEF, 2008).



**Connect** with people around you, friends, relatives or co-workers you haven't spoken to in a while. Try to make new connections where possible.

### Keep Learning

Try something new; a new recipe, hobby, or language course. Take on a different responsibility in work. Set yourself a challenge you will enjoy achieving.

**Be Active** Do what you can to stay active. Try a new class in the gym, walk instead of getting the bus, try gardening, dancing, or cycling. Choose something you enjoy, that suits your mobility and fitness.

### Give

Do one good deed every day. Smile at a passer-by. Make someone a cup of tea. Join a community group. Doing good for someone else can be beneficial for your mental health.

### Take Notice

Take time to look around you; notice changes in the world, the passing of seasons. Be aware of your feelings and reflect on your experiences. Be present in the here and now.



Mental Health Ireland is a national voluntary organisation whose aim is to promote positive mental health and wellbeing to all individuals and communities in Ireland.

## OUR VISION

Mental Health Ireland's vision is for an Ireland where mental health is valued as being an essential part of personal wellbeing and the health of the nation. Mental Health Ireland will lead the way in informing Irish society's understanding of mental health and fostering a culture where people with mental health difficulties are respected and supported.

## TEXT TO DONATE

Text MHI to 50300 to donate €4 to Mental Health Ireland.

100% of your donations goes to Mental Health Ireland across most network operators. Some operators apply VAT which means that a minimum of €3.25 will go to Mental Health Ireland.

Service provider: LikeCharity's helpline is **076 680 5278**.  
Charity Number CHY 5594

[facebook.com/Mental.Health.Ireland](https://facebook.com/Mental.Health.Ireland)

[instagram.com/mentalhealthireland/](https://instagram.com/mentalhealthireland/)

[twitter.com/MentalHealthIrl](https://twitter.com/MentalHealthIrl)

Information provided by the Mental Health Foundation.



**Mental Health  
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**MENTAL HEALTH IRELAND**

Promoting Positive Mental Health  
and Wellbeing

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