

Treatment for anxiety

Professional counsellors are trained specialists that can help teach you strategies such as relaxation and how to control your thinking.

Medication can be a good temporary solution for those who are affected seriously by anxiety.

Family doctors are often the first people contacted when seeking professional help. Your doctor may refer you on for special help.

Your workplace EAP is a good place to start for free professional support with your anxiety.

What to do if you (or someone you know) has symptoms of anxiety

- Understand the facts about anxiety, causes, types and treatments.
- Recognise the symptoms and determine their severity and how long they have lasted.
- Talk things over, especially how you/they are thinking and feeling, with an understanding friend.
- Don't expect too much of yourself/them. Avoid setting difficult goals or taking on too much responsibility.
- Avoid extra stress or big changes, they can create too much tension.
- Take breaks (days out, evenings out, a trip, a visit etc).
- Take time to do some of those things you/they find enjoyable and relaxing.
- Get some exercise to help work off bottled up tension, to help you relax and sleep better.

The ideas and strategies outlined in this brochure are often beneficial, but are not comprehensive. Assistance from a professional counsellor may help you to make quicker progress. Remember to use your workplace EAP as a resource.

**Call your EAP on
1800 056 076**

Gryphon Psychology provide a free professional, independent and confidential counselling and consulting service. This service assists employees in both the private and public sectors to find solutions to any work or personal/family problems that are affecting their quality of life and which may be impacting on their effectiveness at work. If needed, our counsellors can make referrals to specialist agencies for particular problems, or for ongoing support.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is completely confidential, and provided by your employer at no cost to you.



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Managing Anxiety

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Anxiety and tension are common problems. Many people seek help from a doctor or professional counsellor every year because of these feelings. Common treatments for these problems in the past involved a reliance on the use of medications such as tranquillisers. While medication can help, research has shown that other treatments are also highly effective. The new approaches involve teaching people more effective ways to cope. Teaching people skills to manage their anxiety is similar to learning how to drive a car or play an instrument.

Anxiety is a normal reaction

In times of imminent danger we feel anxious and our bodily system speeds up to help us take immediate action. This is called the fight or flight response, and is a normal survival reaction to threatening events. Having a moderate level of anxiety can therefore improve our performance and motivate us to take the right action.

Very high levels of anxiety reduce our ability to perform in a range of everyday life situations. When this happens it becomes necessary to learn how to control it. Anxiety can never be totally removed however because it is a normal healthy reaction. The aim is to learn to manage it and use it positively.

Understanding common types of anxiety

Phobias

A phobia is an exaggerated fear that is uncontrollable and often unreasonable. Many people have specific phobias, which include fear of spiders, flying, heights, etc. Other phobias include social phobia (fear of social embarrassment).

Panic Attack

A panic attack is the experience of a sudden overpowering fear. The first few panic attacks are often unpredictable, and tremendously frightening. Over time, sufferers learn what triggers the attack and begin to avoid certain aspects of their normal life, and may develop agoraphobia or become depressed.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Following a terrible or catastrophic event, some people can become so traumatised and stressed, that they develop PTSD. Many sufferers have recurring nightmares and intrusive thoughts of the event during waking hours.

What are common symptoms of anxiety?

Bodily sensations

Common symptoms include sweating, trembling, racing heart, irregular breathing, and upset stomach.

Behaviour

When faced with a situation of fear, the common response is to avoid the situation or to flee the situation as quickly as possible.

Thinking

Negative and irrational thoughts are common responses. For example, "*I'll never cope with this*", "*I am going to die*", "*I can't do this*", or "*If I go into that situation I will faint*".

What triggers anxiety symptoms?

The kind of person you are:

Some people have a more sensitive emotional nervous system and a more vulnerable type of personality. Others may have learned how to worry from their parents' poor styles of coping.

The amount of stress you are under:

Stress can be measured by the number of problems (small and large) and the amount of recent change(s) in your life. When you are dealing with many traumas and changes, you may feel tired and run down, and more vulnerable to anxiety symptoms.

What keeps the anxiety going?

1. **Avoiding feared situations** because of irrational beliefs you have about the situation and its consequences.
2. **Misinterpreting normal healthy anxiety symptoms.** For example, you may feel overwhelmed with a conflict situation at work which produces a racing heart and trembling hands. These are a normal response to feeling upset. However, anxiety will be worsened if you think "I'm going to die of a heart attack", or "I'm going to completely lose control".

What can you do to manage your anxiety?

A professional counsellor can help you to understand the anxiety cycle, the links between physical symptoms, worrying thoughts, avoidance of feared situations, and loss of confidence in certain life situations. There is also a link between this cycle and feelings of depression and hopelessness.

Learn to break this cycle at three levels:

- Relaxation and controlled breathing to manage the physical symptoms.
- Challenge your worrying thoughts and replace these with more positive ones to control negative thinking.
- Combine relaxation and challenging your own thoughts to help you face difficult situations instead of avoiding them.