

## **Top Tips for Dealing with Anxiety**

What actually is anxiety? It's a feeling of unease, nervousness or maybe even fear that we all experience from time to time. Some people may have physical symptoms, such as; increased heart rate, pain in the chest, blurred vision, 'jelly' legs, pins and needles in extremities, sickly feeling, stomach pain, feeling hot and sweaty.

It can also affect the way we think about things, for example, the world can seem like a scary place and your mind jumps to 'worst case scenario' on a regular basis. With both physical and psychological symptoms, anxiety can start to affect your behaviour, for example you might avoid seeing people or going out, you might have difficulty sleeping, or maybe you feel like you just can't switch off your brain. Some people feel that they have to 'stay connected' permanently for fear of 'missing out'.

### **How to cope with anxiety**

Anxiety can take many different forms ie social anxiety, work or school anxiety, health anxiety, specific phobias and fears, or more generalised anxiety. The most important thing to remember, is not to be afraid to ask for help.

Below are some top tips for helping to manage anxiety:

#### **1) Take 5 deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth**

When we get anxious the body's 'fight or flight' response is activated. This response is the body's way of protecting you in a threatening situation. It is a series of changes in the body including the release of adrenaline and an increase in heart rate which are designed to help you be stronger (fight) or help you move faster (flight), all very useful if we are under attack, but not very useful if you are going to school or planning to meet friends! Breathing deeply can help to counteract many of the physical symptoms and help the body settle down and restore its natural equilibrium. It is useful to imagine you are blowing up a balloon of your favourite colour. Take a deep breath in and notice how your stomach rises as you inhale which allows your lungs to take in maximum air, then let a long, slow, breath out as if you are filling your balloon with air and do this five times.

#### **2) Question your thoughts**

Our thinking can become distorted as a result of our mind playing tricks on us when we are anxious. For example, a friend failing to return a text may lead you to think that they are not talking to you, or not being invited to an event, can make you feel like you are deliberately being excluded. Before you accept the thought, which will undoubtedly increase your anxiety, ask yourself is that anxious thought a "fact or an opinion?". If it is an opinion, you may be getting anxious for nothing.

### **3) Test it out**

Often, when we get anxious about things, we are making a negative prediction about what will happen and imagining the worse-case scenario, for example; I can't go to that party on my own because no one will talk to me or, I can't contact my friend to see if they want to meet up, as they might just be saying yes to please me, not because they want to meet me or even, they won't want to go out with me, so there's no point in asking. If you make negative predictions, instead, be like a scientist and test it out or how will you ever know if your prediction was right?

### **4) Don't fall into the avoidance trap**

Anxiety is an uncomfortable emotion and many people fall into the trap of avoiding the thing or situation they fear, so that they don't experience the anxiety, for example avoiding meeting up with friends in case they are judged or excluded. However, when you avoid situations, you are not dealing with the anxiety, so life can become more and more difficult as you work hard to avoid all the things you fear, and eventually you may end up in a situation where you are trying to avoid more and more situations. Because you haven't dealt with the fear, the anxiety feels even worse. So, face your fear. You will feel anxious but if you repeatedly face it, your body adjusts to the thing you fear, and your physical anxiety reduces. If facing your fear is daunting, try breaking it down into small steps, for example, ask a friend to come over to you first, before suggesting a group of you goes out together. As you repeatedly challenge your own thinking, your anxiety will reduce, and you will feel more motivated to tackle other areas that once made you feel anxious.

### **5) Acceptance**

Anxiety, although uncomfortable, is a normal emotion and no matter how much you want to get rid of it, we all feel anxious from time to time. Accepting anxiety, can be just like accepting that sometimes we feel angry, or sometimes we feel sad and sometimes we feel happy, and just like those other emotions, anxiety will pass. If your anxiety it is getting in the way of you doing the everyday things you want and need to do, make sure you ask a professional for help.