



Wellbeing

Anxiety

Identifying and Managing Anxiety Part 1

Do you ever worry you might say the wrong thing, or perhaps make a mistake at work, or even worry about what the future holds? Worry is all around us, and it will differ from person to person in content, frequency and intensity. One of the first steps to managing stress, anxiety or worry, is to understand how it affects you (or if it affects you!). We'll be sharing some practical, NHS approved advice in this, and the next article.

How does your stress or worry affect you? Some common symptoms are listed in the table below, and can be used to recognise how each of us react to anxiety, or to keep track of what we might be experiencing at different times.

How we feel <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Irritable<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious<input type="checkbox"/> Low Mood<input type="checkbox"/> Low self esteem	How we think <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Continuous worrying<input type="checkbox"/> Trouble concentrating<input type="checkbox"/> Thoughts racing<input type="checkbox"/> Imagining the worst<input type="checkbox"/> Going over and over things
How we behave <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Temper outbursts<input type="checkbox"/> Increased drinking<input type="checkbox"/> Increased smoking<input type="checkbox"/> On the go, constantly<input type="checkbox"/> Talking more or faster<input type="checkbox"/> Changes in eating habits<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawing from friends/loved ones<input type="checkbox"/> Being unreasonable<input type="checkbox"/> Being forgetful or clumsy	How our bodies work <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Headaches<input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach problems<input type="checkbox"/> Sweating<input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness<input type="checkbox"/> Breathlessness<input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty hands<input type="checkbox"/> Dry mouth<input type="checkbox"/> Tingling in body<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual problems

It's important to recognise that anxiety is normal. Stress and worry are both normal human responses. In fact, it was one of the keys to survival for our ancestors – they knew when to anticipate danger through understanding anxiety in their context. Anxiety becomes a problem when we start to see it affecting our lives for the worse. When we are ticking more of those boxes of stress indicators on a regular basis – that's when we may be finding ourselves becoming consumed by it.

What can we do to overcome or manage this?

Step one is to recognise when this happens to you. Try keeping a stress and worry diary (you can find an example of one later in this article). It'll be clear then just how often you are anxious, and what those triggers are. You might even surprise yourself by putting down less than you thought you would!

Once we start to identify triggers of stress and anxiety, we can actively put things in place to manage the demands we are facing, no matter what they may be. We often feel stressed when our perceived ability to cope is outweighed by demands. What we really want to do is to find a way to level the playing field.

Actions for managing stress:

- Identify problems using your stress diary (see example later)
- Work through the problem: jot down every possible answer to the problem you are facing (silly or serious), and then select the two most viable. Put them in a pros and cons table and work through to find a good solution. Give it a go, and evaluate how it went!
- Make time for the people you enjoy being around
- Make time for the things you like to do
- Talk to your line manager about what is causing you stress, and together discuss ways to alleviate it
- Eat well
- Try to get 6-8 hours of sleep per night (and try to put a routine in place for bedtime)
- Exercise three times a week for at least 20 minutes – this could be a walk around the block.

The Stress Diary

Date	Where was I?	What was I doing at the time?	Who was I with?	How did I feel?	What was I thinking?	What did I start doing?	What happened physically?	Stress rating (0-10)
e.g. 07.11.2020	Supermarket	Food shopping	Alone	Overwhelmed Stressed Panicky Crowded	"I'm spending too much money" "I want to get out of here" "I need someone to talk to"	Rushing to get it all done, skipping things on my list	Breathing heavily Shaking Body-tension	8