

Mental health in primary care

Anxiety

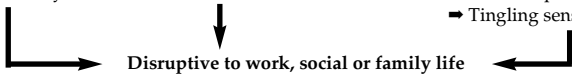
Common symptoms

Psychological:

- ➔ Tension
- ➔ Worry
- ➔ Panic
- ➔ Feelings of unreality
- ➔ Fear of going crazy
- ➔ Fear of dying
- ➔ Fear of losing control

Physical:

- ➔ Trembling
- ➔ Sweating
- ➔ Heart pounding
- ➔ Light headedness
- ➔ Dizziness
- ➔ Muscle tension
- ➔ Nausea
- ➔ Breathlessness
- ➔ Numbness
- ➔ Stomach pains
- ➔ Tingling sensation



Anxiety disorders are common and treatable

Anxiety *does not* mean weakness

Anxiety *does not* mean losing the mind

Anxiety *does not* mean personality problems

Severe anxiety *does* mean a disorder which requires treatment.

Common forms of anxiety

Generalized anxiety disorder:

- ➔ persistent/excessive worry
- ➔ physical symptoms.

Panic disorder:

- ➔ sudden intense fear
- ➔ physical symptoms
- ➔ psychological symptoms.

Social phobia:

- ➔ Fear/avoidance social situations
- ➔ fear of being criticized
- ➔ physical symptoms
- ➔ psychological symptoms.

Agoraphobia:

- ➔ Fear/avoidance of situations where escape is difficult
- ➔ leaving familiar places alone
- ➔ physical symptoms
- ➔ psychological symptoms.

What treatments can help?

Both therapies are most often needed:

Supportive therapy for:

- ➔ slow breathing/relaxation
- ➔ exposure to feared situations
- ➔ realistic/positive thinking
- ➔ problem-solving.

Medication:

- ➔ for severe anxiety
- ➔ for panic attacks.

About medication

Short term

- ➔ use for severe anxiety
- ➔ can be addictive and ineffective when used in the long term

Side-effects

- ➔ are important to report

Ongoing review

- ➔ of medication use is recommended.

Counselling

- ➔ (emotional support and problem-solving) is always recommended with medication

Slow breathing to reduce physical symptoms of anxiety

- ➔ Breath in for three seconds and out for three seconds, and pause for three seconds before breathing in again.
- ➔ Practise 10 minutes morning or night (five minutes is better than nothing).
- ➔ Use before and during situations that make you anxious.
- ➔ Regularly check and slow down breathing throughout the day.

Change attitudes and ways of thinking

'My chest is hurting and I can't breathe, I must be having a heart attack.'

Instead: 'I am having a panic attack, I should slow my breathing down and I will feel better.'

'I hope they don't ask me a question, I won't know what to say.'

Instead: 'Whatever I say will be OK, I am not being judged. Others are not being judged, why should I be?'

'My partner has not called as planned. Something terrible must have happened.'

Instead: 'They might not have been able to get to a phone. It is very unlikely that something terrible has happened.'

Exposure to overcome anxiety and avoidance

Easy stage



Moderate stage



Hard stage

(eg walking on own)

(eg lunch with a friend)

(eg shopping with a friend)

- ➔ Use slow breathing to control anxiety
- ➔ Do not move to the next stage until anxiety decreases to an acceptable level.