

INFORMATION ABOUT ANXIETY

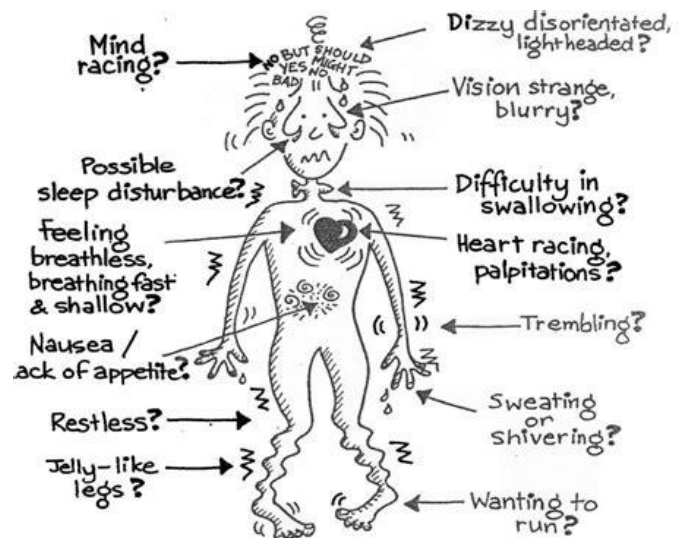
What is anxiety?

Anxiety refers to an emotional state consisting of worry, nervousness, or a sense of apprehension. It typically arises in relation to an upcoming event where the outcome is uncertain, or where the person feels he or she might not be up to the task. Anxiety is commonly experienced in situations perceived to be high pressure, for example, prior to making a speech or sitting an exam. Feelings of anxiety can also arise following a stressful event, like an accident where the person is left feeling shaken. Anxious feelings are usually accompanied by a number of signs and symptoms listed below. In some cases, people can become anxious without knowing the cause.

Signs and symptoms

Although the experience of anxiety will vary from person to person, feeling stressed, worried, and having anxious thoughts are common symptoms. Other common symptoms of anxiety include:

- Mind racing
- Sleep disturbance
- Breathing difficulties and choking
- Low frustration tolerance and anger
- Relationship difficulties
- Problems performing
- Restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoidance behaviour
- Sexual dysfunction
- Rapid heartbeat
- Trembling or shaking
- Feeling lightheaded or faint
- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Upset stomach or nausea
- Sweating
- Increased use of substances
- Changes in eating or weight loss or gain



What causes anxiety disorders?

Whilst there is no single known cause of anxiety disorders, there are a number of risk factors or triggers that may contribute. These vary between different anxiety disorders too. In general, the following factors may play a role:

- **Genes:** Certain anxiety disorders appear to have a genetic component. Some anxiety disorders have a familial history.
- **Physical health and lifestyle factors:** These factors can increase a person's vulnerability to developing symptoms of anxiety.
- **Personality and thinking style:** Patterns of behaving and thinking characterised by anticipating the worst, persistent negative self-talk, low self-esteem and unhelpful coping strategies (e.g., avoidance) are linked to anxiety.
- **Stress:** Stressful events such as a marriage breakdown, work or school deadlines and financial hardship can act as a trigger for anxiety.

Treatments that work

The following strategies can be used to assist people better manage their anxiety:

- **Relaxation** - Learning relaxation techniques such as simple breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation, and practicing them regularly, is a component of effective treatment for anxiety.
- **Problem solving** - Problem-solving skills help a person develop better insight and understanding and enhances coping with situations or thoughts that are making them stressed or anxious. Structured problem solving involves: identifying the problem; exploring, selecting and implementing a solution to the problem; and evaluating its helpfulness.
- **Mindfulness** - In mindfulness-based therapy, the focus is on being in the moment and aware of the distress about the experience of anxiety, rather than anxiety itself. The person is assisted to focus on bodily sensations and thoughts that arise when anxious instead of avoiding, withdrawing or fighting against these symptoms. This results in the person becoming more open and accepting of thoughts and sensations associated with anxiety and less overwhelmed by them. This allows the person to engage more fully with life.
- **Cognitive restructuring** - Feelings of anxiety sometimes stem from an individual's negative or unhelpful thoughts. Cognitive restructuring is a technique used by psychologists to help a person challenge negative thoughts and develop more helpful and constructive ways of thinking.
- **Exposure therapy** - Exposure therapy involves the psychologist guiding a person through a series of real or imaginary scenarios to confront specific fears. Through a gradual process of exposure, the person learns to cope more effectively with these fears, and with practice, the anxious response naturally decreases.

In addition to the above psychological techniques, making simple changes to a person's lifestyle can help lower stress and anxiety. Lifestyle changes can include: regular exercise, lowering or eliminating alcohol and caffeine, engaging in enjoyable activities, improving time-management skills, and having adequate sleep.

How a Psychologist can help

Through assessment and counselling, psychologists develop an understanding of the factors that might be contributing to anxiety. A therapy plan is then developed in collaboration with the client. For anxiety disorders, this can involve relaxation, mindfulness, CBT, exposure therapy and other helpful strategies.

The psychologist can also assist making lifestyle changes to enhance resilience to cope better and reduce symptoms of anxiety.

When to seek professional help

If anxiety is affecting a person's work, school, home life, or relationships, psychological assistance should be considered. **iflow psychology** can assist. **Just call 0431 564 257 or book an appointment online** at www.iflowpsychology.com.au

If you want to claim a rebate from Medicare for up to ten sessions then ask your treating doctor to provide a referral and Mental Health Plan. A mental health plan form can be printed from our website for your treating doctor.