

# Anxiety Information Document

## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

## When does anxiety become a problem?

Anxiety can become a mental health problem if it impacts on your ability to live your life as fully as you want to. For example, it may be a problem for you if:

- Your feelings of anxiety are very strong or last for a long time
- Your fears or worries are out of proportion to the situation
- You avoid situations that might cause you to feel anxious
- Your worries feel very distressing or are hard to control
- You regularly experience symptoms of anxiety, which could include panic attacks
- You find it hard to go about your everyday life or do things you enjoy.

## Symptoms of anxiety

### Physical symptoms:

- A churning feeling in your stomach
- Feeling light-headed or dizzy
- Pins and needles
- Feeling restless or unable to sit still
- Headaches, backache or other aches and pains
- Faster breathing
- A fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat
- Sweating or hot flushes
- Problems sleeping
- Grinding your teeth, especially at night
- Nausea (feeling sick)
- Dizziness
- Trouble sleeping
- Needing the toilet more or less often
- Changes in your sex drive
- Having panic attacks

### Psychological symptoms

- Feeling tense or unable to relax
- A sense of dread
- Feeling like other people can notice that you're anxious and are looking at you
- Worrying about anxiety itself e.g. worrying that a panic attack will happen
- Wanting reassurance from others or worrying that they are angry or upset with you
- Rumination e.g. thinking over an experience or situation again and again
- Feeling like you are losing touch with reality, feeling disconnected from your mind or body, or feeling disconnected from the world around you

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## Anxiety Disorders

If you have some specific symptoms you may be diagnosed with a particular anxiety disorder, but not all people who suffer from anxiety are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Types of anxiety disorder include:

### Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

GAD is a long-term condition that causes you to feel anxious about a wide range of things on a regular basis. It can cause you to feel anxious most days and worries become uncontrollable.

### Social Anxiety Disorder

This means you experience extreme fear or panic due to social situations, such as parties, meeting friends or being in a workplace.

### Panic Disorder

People with Panic Disorder experience regular or frequent panic attacks without a clear cause or trigger. You may live in constant fear of having a panic attack, so that even the fear of having one may trigger panic attacks.

### Phobias

A phobia is an extreme fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation (e.g. a social situation) or a particular object (e.g. spiders).

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is caused by experiencing a traumatic event and it involves experiencing anxiety symptoms and triggers flashbacks and nightmares.

### Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD consists of repetitive thoughts and behaviours.

### Health Anxiety

Involves obsessions and compulsions relating to illness. Sufferers may research symptoms obsessively or constantly check if they have any.

### Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)

Obsessions and compulsions relating to one's physical appearance.

### Perinatal Anxiety or Perinatal Disorder

Anxiety issues developed during or in the first year after giving birth.

### Anxiety and other mental health problems

It's very common to experience anxiety alongside other mental health problems, such as depression or suicidal feelings. If you have symptoms of both anxiety and depression but don't fit one more clearly than the other, you might be given a diagnosis of mixed anxiety and depressive disorder.

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## Panic attacks

When anxiety is at its most severe, some people experience panic attacks. Panic attacks are a rush of intense physical and mental symptoms which can be very scary, especially if it is the first time and/ or you don't know what is happening.

Panic attacks usually last between 5 and 20 minutes but can last for up to an hour.

Although panic attacks can be very frightening they are not dangerous and it is unlikely you will need to go to hospital if you have one.

Symptoms include:

- Racing heartbeat
- Feeling faint
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Trembling
- Hot flushes
- Chills
- Shaky limbs
- A choking sensation
- Dizziness
- Pins and needles
- Numbness
- A strong sense of dread and fear of dying
- Feeling disconnected to your body

## Causes of anxiety

No one knows exactly what causes anxiety problems, but there probably lots of factors involved. For example:

### Past or childhood experiences

Difficult experiences in childhood, adolescence or adulthood are a common trigger for anxiety problems. Going through stress and trauma is likely to have a particularly big impact if it happens when you're very young. Experiences which can trigger anxiety problems include things like:

- Physical or emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Losing a parent
- Being bullied or being socially excluded.

Having parents who don't treat you warmly, are overprotective or are emotionally inconsistent can also be a factor.

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### Your current life situation

Current issues or problems in your life can also trigger anxiety. For example:

- Exhaustion or a build-up of stress
- Long working hours
- Being out of work
- Feeling under pressure while studying or in work
- Having money problems
- Homelessness or housing problems
- Losing someone close to you
- Feeling lonely or isolated
- Being bullied, harassed or abused.

### Drugs and medication

Anxiety can sometimes be a side effect of taking:

- Some psychiatric medications
- Some medications for physical health problems
- Recreational drugs or alcohol.

### Physical or mental health problems

Other health problems can sometimes cause anxiety, or might make it worse. For example:

- Physical health problems – living with a serious, ongoing or life-threatening physical health condition can sometimes trigger anxiety.
- Other mental health problems – it's also common to develop anxiety while living with other mental health problems, such as depression.

## Self-Help Tips

### Talk to someone

- Try to talking to someone you trust, it can help to relieve your mental burden and think rationally and practically about your problems
- This might be a friend, family member or someone in your local community who you can trust
- Talking about mental health problems can be incredibly difficult, particularly if you come from a country or are part of a culture in which mental health is taboo – you do not have an obligation to talk to someone who may make your anxiety even worse by judging you or downplaying your issues
- However, you will likely find that others you know have experienced anxiety too and may be able to support you
- The ACAA is also always there to offer non-judgemental, practical support

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### Managing your worries

- Try setting aside a specific time to think about your worries – so you can reassure yourself that you haven't forgotten them, some people find it helps to set a timer for this
- Write down everything you are worried about – this can help to make your worries less frightening
- It may help to keep these lists in a particular place, for example in a jar, a notebook or an envelope
- Make a to-do list or timetable for your week – this may reassure you that you are allowing enough time to do everything you need to and that you won't forget to do anything important

### Look after your physical health

- Try to get enough sleep
- Think about your diet – eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar level steady can help your mood and energy levels
- Physical activity – exercise has been proven to reduce stress and improve your mood significantly

### Distraction activities

- Doing activities which you enjoy can help to reduce anxiety
- Activities which involve using your hands like drawing, colouring-in, knitting or painting can be particularly good for reducing anxiety

### Rational thinking

- With anxiety, your problems can feel overwhelming and impossible to solve
- It helps to try to think rationally about your problems
- For example imagine you are giving advice to someone else about your problems – if you were advising someone else you would give practical and rational advice and help them to find a solution
- Try writing down something that is causing you anxiety, then below write down a list of practical things you can do to help solve the problem or to make yourself feel less worried about it. Then decide when you will take these steps. It may make you feel a lot better to do just one thing on the list to contribute to solving the problem

### Breathing exercises

- Breathing exercises are a simple yet effective way of reducing anxiety on a daily basis
- Try searching online for breathing exercises, meditation or mindfulness in Farsi
- Or just try it yourself: Sit down in a comfortable position, breathe in through your nose while counting to 4, hold your breath for 7 seconds, breathe out through your mouth for 8 seconds
- Yoga is a form of physical exercise which incorporates breathing exercises, it can be done in the comfort of your own home by following youtube videos and some anxiety sufferers find it very helpful. Tip: 'Samin Yoga' ([youtube.com/saminyoga](https://www.youtube.com/saminyoga)) and 'Sara Letschert' ([youtube.com/saraletschert](https://www.youtube.com/saraletschert)) do Yoga sessions in Farsi which are available on YouTube

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### Keep a diary

- It might help to make a note of what happens when you get anxious or have a panic attack. This could help you spot patterns in what triggers these experiences for you, or notice early signs that they are beginning to happen
- You could also make a note of what's going well - living with anxiety can mean you think a lot about things that worry you or are hard to do, it's important to be kind to yourself and notice the good things too

### Preventing panic attacks

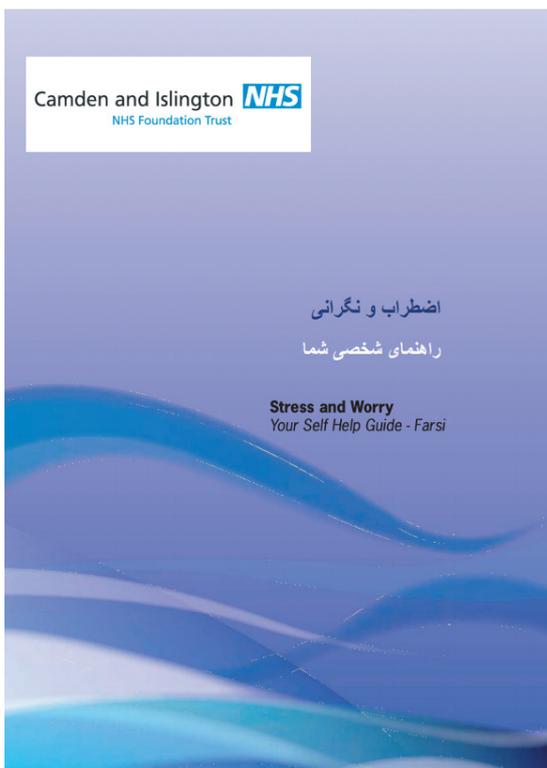
- Do breathing exercises each day
- Do regular exercise
- Eat regular meals to stabilise your blood sugar levels
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and smoking

### What to do in a panic attack

- Remind yourself that you are having a panic attack and that it will pass
- Try closing your eyes and do deep breathing
- If you are with people or in a noisy place try to find somewhere quiet until it has passed
- Find an object to focus on, think about how it feels, who made it and what shape it is
- Picture a happy, relaxing place – think about the sights, sounds, smells etc. of that place

Self-help is highly effective for treating anxiety. Try this self-help guide in Farsi:

[http://hereisthetranslation.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/27-draft\\_stress\\_and\\_worry-farsi-2012-final2.pdf](http://hereisthetranslation.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/27-draft_stress_and_worry-farsi-2012-final2.pdf)



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## Types of treatment for anxiety

### Talking treatments

If self-help isn't enough to help your anxiety, you may need to use a talking treatment. To find out what options are available to you, visit your GP. If your English is too limited to take part in the therapy you may be able to get an interpreter. This is usually preferable to using a family member to interpret for you as it is more confidential.

Talking treatments for anxiety include:

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – this focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and behaviour and teaches coping skills
- Applied relaxation therapy – this involved learning how to relax your muscles in situations where you normally experience anxiety

### Medication

Your doctor might recommend taking medication to ease some of your symptoms. This might be:

#### Antidepressants

- The most common form of antidepressants are called SSRIs, they work by increasing the level of the chemical serotonin in your brain
- However, some people experience uncomfortable side effects, in particular for some people it may increase their anxiety and cause nausea

#### Pregabalin

- This is a medicine used to treat sufferers of epilepsy, but can also be used to treat anxiety
- It is less likely than antidepressants to cause side effects of nausea and low sex drive

#### Benzodiazepine tranquilisers

- Benzodiazepines are sedatives that may be used as a form of short-term treatment for a severe period of anxiety
- This is because they help ease symptoms within 30 to 90 minutes of taking them
- However, they cannot be used for long periods - they are highly addictive if used for longer than 4 weeks

#### Beta-blockers

- Beta-blockers treat the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as rapid heartbeat and shaking – they are not psychiatric drugs
- They last for a short period of time and are only taken when necessary, not at regular times like antidepressants
- They can be taken to make a panic attack less severe or to help confront a phobia

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### How to help someone with anxiety

Try to understand:

- Find out as much as you can about anxiety. This will help you understand what they are going through. Reading personal experiences can help too
- Ask about their experience. You could ask them how anxiety affects their day-to-day life, and what makes it better or worse. Listening to their experience could help you to empathise with how they feel
- Be kind and non-judgemental, let them know you're there for them
- Make the person feel that their struggles are valid, don't dismiss them - don't say things like 'everyone gets stressed sometimes', 'things aren't that bad for you', or 'you have so much to be thankful for'

Support them to seek help:

If you think your friend or family member's anxiety is becoming a problem for them, you could encourage them to seek appropriate treatment by talking to a GP or therapist. You could:

- Offer to help them arrange a doctor's appointment. If they are scared of leaving the house, you could suggest they ring their GP to find out if they will do home visits
- Offer support when they attend appointments. You could offer to go with them to their appointments and wait in the waiting room. You can also help them plan what they'd like to talk about with the doctor
- Help them seek help from a therapist

It is important to support someone without being too pushy. Seeking help can be very challenging and putting too much pressure on someone may make things worse.