



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

Generalised Anxiety & Panic

Help Yourself @ moodcafe.co.uk



This leaflet should be read alongside the leaflet “Understanding anxiety” also produced by Fife Psychology Department and available on moodcafe.co.uk

Anxiety

Everyone has experienced anxiety – it is normal.

But anxiety can become a problem if it is experienced frequently or in situations that should not really be stressful. Sometimes anxiety problems are experienced in a specific way and are recognised as a particular anxiety condition. Two of the most common anxiety conditions are:

- Free floating or generalised anxiety
- and
- Panic attacks

Generalised anxiety

For some people, anxiety problems mean that they feel tense and anxious most of the time. A person who feels like this will worry about everything, even though he or she knows that the worries are “over the top”.



People who experience this generalised or free-floating anxiety find it impossible to relax.

They can experience many of the physical effects of anxiety, such as butterflies in the stomach, shakiness, headaches, muscle pain, tiredness, difficulties swallowing, rapid heartbeat and sleep problems.

They can find it difficult to make decisions, can be irritable and get upset easily. They generally feel as though they are not coping with day to day things. Often these feelings can be worse when the person has nothing big to concentrate on e.g. after work or when they are going to bed.

This state of free-floating anxiety can be interrupted by panic attacks.

Panic attacks

Panic attacks tend to come on suddenly and involve a strong feeling that something terrible is about to happen. There are a range of physical symptoms including:

Breathlessness	Chest Pain	Hot and cold flushes
Shaking	Trembling	Palpitations
Choking feeling	Sweating	Dizziness
Numbness	Faintness	Feeling of unreality

The physical symptoms of panic can be brought on by illness (e.g. flu), standing up too quickly, drinking too much caffeine (e.g. in tea, coffee or fizzy drinks) or if your blood sugar level is low (e.g. if you miss meals).

Panic attacks are linked to the body's reaction to stress – the fight/flight response.

When we feel we are in danger our body produces a rush of adrenaline. This happens very quickly. It causes physical changes such as our heart rate speeds up and blood leaves our stomach and goes to our muscles. This fight or flight reaction has happened for centuries - our ancestors needed to cope quickly with wild animals or enemy attack. The flight/fight response does not necessarily cause any problems but sometimes

people do feel sick or faint or experience many of the other unpleasant things that happen in a panic attack. This happens because of changes in their breathing.

When a panic attack begins people usually start to over-breathe, i.e. fast and shallow breathing from the top of the chest. This leads to a loss of carbon dioxide and a change in their body chemistry. It is this change which causes faintness, trembling and dizziness.

Many people have frightening thoughts when they are having a panic attack. The thoughts make people want to run out and escape.



Remember - the symptoms of a panic attack are not dangerous. Such thoughts just make the anxiety worse.

Overcoming Panic and Anxiety problems

Suffering an anxiety condition is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. It can sometimes be hard for friends and family to accept that sufferers do have a “real” problem. But overcoming anxiety is not simply a matter of “pulling yourself together”. Below are some resources that can advise you on things to try yourself. There may also be self-help groups in your local area where you can get support.

Books that can help

- **Overcoming Anxiety** by H Kennerley
- **Overcoming Loneliness and Making Friends** by M Csoti
- **Overcoming Panic** by D Silove

- **Overcoming Panic, Anxiety & Phobias New Strategies to Free Yourself from Worry and Fear** by C Goldman & S Babior
- **Overcoming Social Anxiety and Shyness** by G Butler

These books are also available through the fife book prescription scheme. More information is available at moodcafé - www.moodcafe.co.uk/books-that-can-help.aspx

Self-help leaflets/courses

- Living Life is a free telephone service that offers guided self-help. More information is available on the NHS 24 website - www.nhs24.com/UsefulResources/LivingLife
- There are leaflets that cover other types of anxiety disorders on moodcafé – www.moodcafe.co.uk.
- Some organisations offer self-help courses to help individuals to tackle their anxiety: Panic Attacks - www.panic-attacks.co.uk.

Relaxation

Relaxation can help relieve and prevent anxiety.

- Relaxation exercises are available to download on moodcafé - www.moodcafe.co.uk/download-relaxation-exercises.aspx.
- A free relaxation CD and booklet are available from Steps for Stress - www.stepsforstress.org.

Organisations that can help

There are lots of organisations out there that can help. Some have helplines that you can contact to have a chat about your anxiety.

- Anxiety UK - www.anxietyuk.org.uk, helpline – 08444 775 774 (Mon-Fri 9:30am-5:30pm)
- No more panic - www.nomorepanic.co.uk. Includes a forum where you can chat to people who are having similar problems.

For more national helplines and organisations check our moodcafé -

www.moodcafe.co.uk/national-helplines/national-helplines-and-groups-in-fife.aspx.

How to access further help

If you find your anxiety is getting worse, or think you might need further help with your anxiety problems, speak to your GP.



Visit moodcafe.co.uk
for more helpful resources

