



Anxiety

At any one time



will be experiencing anxiety disorder alone and



will be experiencing mixed anxiety and depressive disorder

making it the most prevalent mental health problem in the population as a whole.

Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England, 2007

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a vital emotion, warning us of possible future risks or problems. It keeps us from making bad decisions or judgements - but it's also the emotion most commonly linked with emotional and mental health problems. Anxiety can flare up very quickly, and people struggling with it experience strong physical symptoms, as well as the worry and racing thoughts that accompany it. Understanding it better is often the key to overcoming problems.

What causes anxiety?

We all experience anxiety, but some people are more prone to it than others. Anxiety can also rise up swiftly in response to stress, or sometimes without any obvious cause. Think of it as a bit like a smoke alarm - it warns you that something significant may be about to happen. But sometimes it becomes too sensitive and is triggered too often.

If someone is struggling with anxiety, there may be specific triggers - as in **phobias** - or a general heightened sense of feeling anxious and weighed down by worrying. Many sufferers experience **panic attacks**: moments when the powerful physical symptoms triggered by anxiety (such as sweating, chest pain or dizziness) make them afraid something serious may be happening (a heart attack, for instance) or about to happen (perhaps fainting, or being sick). This sparks more anxiety, making the physical symptoms worse.

Can it be treated?

Anxiety disorders are best treated with a **combination of approaches** which address the different aspects of anxiety: the thought patterns respond very well to **cognitive behavioural therapy** (CBT), and the physical symptoms can be controlled and limited by **relaxation techniques**.

Reducing general stress levels is important, so approaches that help relax or de-stress can play an effective part in treating anxiety.

Medication can work well alongside other therapies, particularly reducing obsessional (round and round) thoughts, or helping people concentrate or function normally. Other treatments can assist to limit and control the physical symptoms of anxiety, especially in circumstances where these might be problematic, like exams or public speaking.



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What about faith?

Faith can be a big support for those struggling with anxiety, because it gives a bigger perspective and reminds us that God is in control. It encourages us to simplify our lives and remember what really matters. Times of prayer and meditation, and skills learned alongside approaches such as 'mindfulness' can help calm nerves, focus the mind and limit panic or waves of anxiety.

Remember, however, that recovering from anxiety problems is not as simple as just being told 'do not fear'. Those suffering will often require expert help as well as the support they get from their faith and church. There may be Bible passages that they find very hard. Often-quoted 'do not worry' scriptures, such as Matthew 6:25-27 or Philippians 4:6-7, can be distressing to people who have tried very hard to do those things, but found no relief for their anxiety. Sufferers must be encouraged not to be too hard on themselves. It's good to find the ways in which their faith helps to calm their nerves, whilst not adding to their worry with scriptures they find hard to process when feeling so anxious.

⇒ Helpful links

If you want to learn more about your emotions, how they work and when and why they can cause problems, this talk may be helpful:

⇒ <https://tinyurl.com/anxiety-learn-more>

First Steps out of Anxiety: a small, easy to read book which explains what anxiety is, how it affects you and how to get on the road to recovery:

⇒ <https://tinyurl.com/first-steps-out-book>

You can read a chapter free here:

⇒ <https://tinyurl.com/anxiety-free-chapter>

Don't know how to stop worrying? The Worry Book addresses how to deal with persistent worries - which often accompany anxiety problems:

⇒ <https://tinyurl.com/anxiety-the-worry-book>

For more on recovery from anxiety, check out:

⇒ <https://tinyurl.com/my-anxiety-recovery-article>

⇒ <https://tinyurl.com/this-super-anxious-article>