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Anxiety and Panic Attacks

Anxiety is a normal human emotion. It can be described as a feeling of unease, such as fear or worry. Anxiety feels different for everyone. It can last for a long time or it might come and go.

Most people feel anxious or scared sometimes. A little bit of anxiety can be helpful as it makes you more alert and can improve your concentration/performance. However, at times in our life, we may experience periods of increased or prolonged anxiety.

This may be because of things that are happening in our lives or due to particular stressful thoughts or feelings. Anxious feelings are caused by an automatic response our bodies make to an event which is perceived as stressful or frightening. This response is called 'fight or flight'.

Fight or Flight Response:

The fight or flight response triggers your brain to release hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) which was originally designed to help prepare your body to run away or fight when it sensed danger. This response still happens today when we sense a perceived danger or a stressful situation. It can trigger the following immediate physical symptoms:

- Our breathing gets faster and heavier, so we can take in extra oxygen for us to run. This can result in feeling sick, dizzy, sweaty or short of breath.
- Our muscles tense to get ready to run which can leave your legs feeling shaky.
- Blood is diverted from our digestive system, to create more energy for running which can result in a feeling 'butterflies' in the stomach and our mouths to go dry.
- Our heart beats stronger and faster, and sometimes irregular, to send blood to the leg muscles.

Although the stressful situations we experience in today's world are very different to the life-threatening ones experienced by our ancestors, they still result in exactly the same response within our bodies, and we have no control over it. It is important to remember that these feelings are normal and should gradually fade when the stressful situation passes and your body returns to a normal state.

Feelings of anxiety usually pass after the stressful situation has come to an end. However, if those feelings continue and our worries become overwhelming or harder to control, then they may affect our lives in a negative way. For example, anxiety can affect your behaviour. You may hide away from others or avoid certain places. It can make you feel unable to cope with a certain situation. Some people can experience anxiety symptoms so strongly that they might think they are dying; this could be what is called a 'Panic Attack'.



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Other signs and symptoms of anxiety / panic

- Feeling tired, on edge, restless or irritable
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Not knowing what is the 'right thing to do'
- Sleep problems
- Headaches and stomach aches
- Avoiding situations or put off doing things you are worried about
- Avoiding, hiding away or withdrawing from friends and family, or from our regular tasks (like work or hobbies)
- Feeling the need to repeatedly check things or seek assurance from others
- Over generalised thinking - thinking that something that has happened in one situation will happen in another
- Some people may start to feel down if they have struggled with anxiety for a long time

It is helpful to try and understand what is causing your feelings of anxiety, why your body is responding in a certain way and how you can manage your anxiety. See our resources below for more information and advice. If you need further help managing your anxiety there is help available.

What can I do to manage anxiety (self-help advice)?

Sometimes we just don't know what is making us feel anxious. Some of the strategies that we use to help manage our anxiety (such as avoiding certain situations or places) may keep us in the cycle of anxiety. The advice below useful may be helpful:

- Try to identify how you are feeling and what thoughts you are having in that moment. Sometimes it is useful keeping a diary to identify your thoughts, as well as what behaviours you 'do' when feeling anxious. For example, not going out with family/friends or cancelling plans.
- Try and shift the focus of how you are feeling in that moment – try breathing exercises or practice mindfulness.
- Try and change your focus and You may find it helpful to get involved in activities going on in your local area. This may help you challenge the way you are thinking and feeling.
- You don't need to experience anxiety on your own. Talk to someone you trust or see below for information on helplines and services.

Helpful resources



[melo.cymru](https://www.melo.cymru)

Visit your local library and ask for the Reading Well Books. There are a wide range of books on anxiety, for young people and adults which you can borrow for free. If you have access to the internet, you can find details of all the Reading Well books on the Melo website. Use the QR code below or search for <https://www.melo.cymru>.

If you need further help managing anxiety

If the information, advice, resources and courses on this page have not been helpful and/or you think you need more help, there are many free support services available.

- If you are worried about your general mental health, contact NHS Mental Health 111 Option 2. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is free to call from a mobile (even when the caller has no credit left) or from a landline. The service will provide immediate support over the phone to help cope with how you are feeling, and if needed, a referral to mental health services will be arranged.
- If you live in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) area, and are aged over 18, you can contact your GP surgery to make an appointment with a Psychological Health Practitioner (PHP) or a GP. PHPs are NHS mental health practitioners, that are available at most GP surgeries in ABUHB area, who provide a free service for people experiencing mild to moderate mental health problems. Appointments can be either face to face, or over the phone.
- If you are under 18 or worried about someone aged under 18 and need urgent advice/self-referral to local mental health and wellbeing services in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board area, contact our SPACE-Wellbeing helpline on: 07977 065376 or email ABB.SpaceWellbeingHelpline@wales.nhs.uk
- C.A.L.L. provides a confidential mental health listening and emotional support line which is **open 24/7**. Call 0800 132 737 or text 'help' to 81066.
- Childline provide help and advice about a wide range of issues for anyone under the age of 19. It is available **24/7** and the number will not show up on your bill. Call 0800 1111.
- Shout is the UK's first **24/7 text service, free** on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis **anytime, anywhere**. Text 'shout' to 85258.



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Accessing anxiety information online

There are digital resources on the Melo website.

If you or someone you know can access information online, please visit

<https://www.melo.cymru/topic/anxiety>

for further information and advice on anxiety.

Alternatively, please scan the QR code on the right.



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