

Beating Anxiety

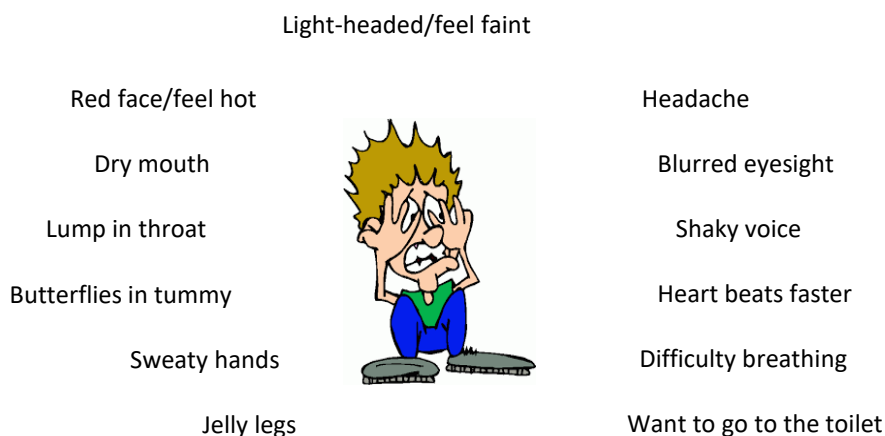
There are times when we all feel worried, anxious, uptight or stressed. Often there is a reason such as

- Preparing for tests or exams
- Telling someone something that they won't like such as you "don't want to be their friend anymore"
- Doing something new or difficult.

Usually you feel better once you have faced the worry. At other times these uncomfortable feelings seem very strong, come often or seem to last a long time. You may not be able to find a clear reason so it may seem hard to know what is making you feel anxious. You may find these unpleasant feelings stop you from doing the things that you would like to do. At these times, it would be useful to learn how you can beat your anxiety.

Understanding your anxious feelings

When people become anxious or scared they often notice a number of changes in their body. This is called the FLIGHT or FIGHT reaction. Your body prepares itself to run away or to face and fight the scary thing. The main signals are listed below. Understanding which of these are strongest will help you to become better at noticing when you are getting wound up.



Learn to Relax

You can control your anxious feelings by learning to relax. You can do this in different ways but remember:

- ❖ There is **no way** of controlling your anxious feelings.
- ❖ **Different methods** may be useful at different times
- ❖ It is important to **find what works for you**.

Physical exercise

Sometimes you may notice that you have felt anxious for most of the day. You may have had lots of feelings of anxiety and when this happens **physical exercise** can be a good way of relaxing.

A good run, a quick walk, cycle or swim can help you get rid of any anxious feelings and can make you feel better.



Absorbing activities

The second way of relaxing is to find something else to think about and do. Rather than listening to your negative thoughts or focusing on your anxious feelings, try to do something else.

Some people find that they can switch these thoughts and feelings off by becoming totally absorbed in an activity.

Computer games, reading, watching TV/DVD, playing an instrument, listening to the radio or music may be helpful.



The more you concentrate on what you are doing, the more you drown out any negative thoughts or feelings.

At those times when you become aware that you are listening to your negative thoughts, try one of the activities you find helpful. So, for example,

- Instead of lying in bed listening to your negative thoughts, listen to some music.
- Instead of worrying whether your friend will call, read a magazine.
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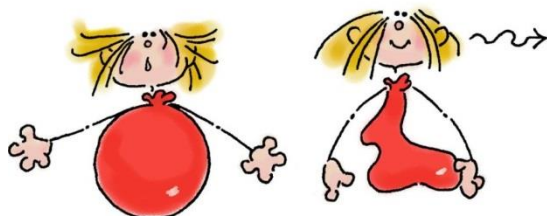
The more you practise, the easier you will find it to block out your negative thoughts and the better you will feel.

Controlled breathing

There are times when you may suddenly notice that you have become anxious and need a quick way to relax and regain control.

Controlled breathing is a quick method that can help. The idea is to concentrate on your breathing and this will help you to relax. You can use this method anywhere and often people don't even notice what you are doing.

Slowly draw in a deep breath, hold it for 5 seconds and then very slowly let it out. As you breathe out say to yourself "relax". Doing this a few times will help you to regain control of your body and help you feel calmer.



My relaxing place

With this method, you chill out by thinking about a special place that you find restful.

Think about your dream place. It could be somewhere you have been or a pretend place. Imagine a picture of it and make the picture as real as you can and think about:

- The noise of the waves crashing on the beach or the sound of the wind blowing in the trees.
- The smell of the sea or the scent of pine forests.
- The warm sun shining on your face or the wind blowing gently through your hair.



Sometimes we get anxious before we have to do something new or challenging. This way of relaxing can help you prepare yourself so that you feel more relaxed before you face your problem or difficult situation. Remember, the more you practise, the more it will help.

Identifying your worrying thoughts

It is important to identify your negative, critical or worrying thoughts. People who feel anxious often:

- ❖ Have very negative thoughts
- ❖ Find it hard to think, hear or see anything good about themselves
- ❖ Do not recognise their positive skills

- ❖ Are more likely to expect bad things to happen
- ❖ Are less likely to think that they can be successful
- ❖ Have a gloomy view about their future

For some, this way of thinking takes over. Their thoughts become mainly negative and they often feel **anxious**.

Are you stuck in a thinking trap?

You may notice that you are thinking in certain negative ways. These are thinking traps and there are four very common traps.

Negative glasses- these only let you see one part of what happens- the negative part! You find it hard to see the good or positive things that happen.



Positive doesn't count – this is where you dismiss as unimportant or put down any positive things that happen.

Blowing things up- this is where the small negative things that happen become bigger than they really are.



Predict that bad things will happen. This happens in two main ways:

- You may become the 'mind-reader' who thinks they know what everyone else is thinking.
- You may become the 'fortune-teller' who thinks they know what is going to happen.

Check and test your thoughts

You can make sure that you haven't become stuck in a negative thinking trap by testing your thoughts. This can help you to find some of the **positive things** that you have ignored or overlooked and learn that there might be another way of thinking about things.

To test your thoughts, try doing this:

- ❖ Write down the negative thought you hear most often?
- ❖ Write down all the evidence that supports this thought?
- ❖ Write down all the evidence to question this thought?
- ❖ As yourself what your best friend/teacher/parent would say if they heard you thinking this?
- ❖ What would you say to your best friend if they had this thought?
- ❖ Now you have done this, is there a more balanced way of thinking about this?

Set up an experiment and test your thoughts

It is sometimes helpful to set up experiments to test your thoughts and see whether what you think will happen comes true. To do an experiment you need to write down:

- Your **thoughts**.
- An **experiment** you could set up to test them.
- Your **prediction** (what you expect will happen)
- What **actually happened**.

Change unhelpful thoughts to helpful thoughts

Sometimes thinking about things in a more positive way can be helpful and may stop you feeling anxious.

So next time you have to do something that makes you feel worried or anxious, listen to your thoughts and try **changing negative to positive**.

Face your fears

People often learn to cope with worries and anxious feelings by avoiding the thing that makes them worried. This may make you feel better but it doesn't help you to beat your worry. At these times, it is usual to **face your fears** and learn to overcome these problems.



You can do this as follows:

- Identify your challenge – the fear you want to face.
- Break your challenge into smaller steps- this will make it easier for you to be successful.
- What are the helpful thoughts that will help you to be successful?
- Relax, use your helpful thoughts and face the first step towards overcoming your fear.
- Don't forget to tell yourself how well you have done!

Once you have been successful, try and face the next step and continue until you have overcome your fears.

Don't forget to praise yourself

We are not always very good at praising ourselves and saying 'well done'. So, when you try to **beat your anxiety** and **face your fears**, remember to praise yourself. After all, you deserve it for having a try!

