



# Anxiety Disorders

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Transition

BY

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## Is it ok for me to feel anxious?

Yes, we all do from time to time. Things like going for a job interview, talking in front of a crowd, sitting exams/tests, worrying about a loved one, or having unexpected change in your life are all normal everyday life situations that can make us feel anxious.

However, if you notice you are feeling excessively anxious and are unable to undertake everyday tasks, for example being unable to leave the house, unable to interact with others socially, finding it hard to manage anxious feelings etc, it maybe that you are developing a mental health illness called Anxiety Disorder, which is different to those normal anxious or stressed feelings we all have from time to time.

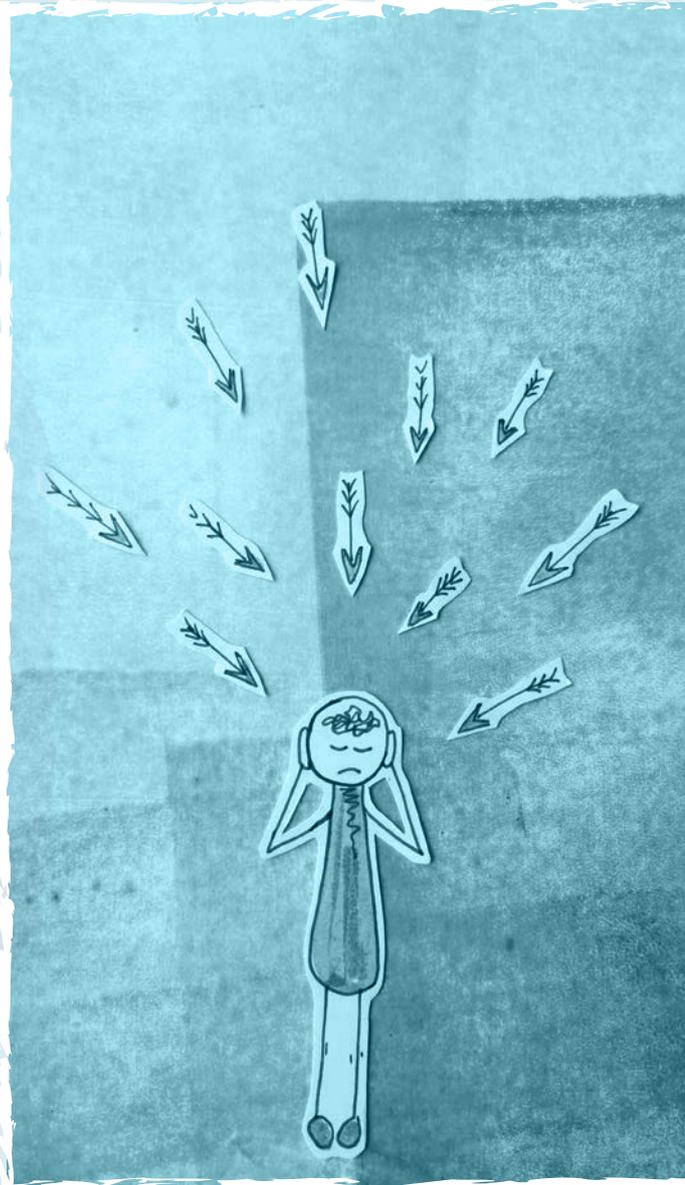
## Let us try to understand what an anxiety disorder is?

Firstly, it is important to know that it is common and it is not our fault. It can affect us physically (our body), our behaviour (our actions), our thinking (cognitive) and the way we feel, (emotions). You may also notice that a lot of this may be excessive and persistent feelings of fear and worry.

Understanding how it affects us can help with learning techniques to help manage or even overcome the illness.

Are you aware that we have an in-built system in our brain that allows us to be alerted to fear? It's the primitive survival part of our brain where decision-making happens and we need this to protect us from danger. This is called our **fight, flight** or **freeze** response.

What is perceived as a threat will be different and vary for each one of us. With an anxiety disorder, it is common to become hyper vigilant and perceive most life situations as worrying, concerning or risky. You may experience a tendency to overthink things, worry excessively and deliberately avoid everyday situations. Your body may react adversely with palpitations or potentially shallow breathing and panic attacks if you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope.



Below are further examples caused by Anxiety Disorder which can alter our body's response physically, emotionally, behaviourally and cognitively.

**Physically** – I start to feel nervous, body shaking, heart rate increases, dry mouth, butterflies in stomach, tired, fatigued, stressed, confused or agitated

**Cognitively** – I keep thinking something bad is going to happen, perceive most things as a threat, I think and fear for my safety, I don't think I want to see others, I overthink a lot of things, I won't think of trying anything new, I think negatively in most situations

**Emotionally** – I feel increasingly anxious, afraid, worried, confused, irritable, stressed and frustrated about most situations or life events

**Behaviourally** – I avoid dealing with problems. I refuse to go out or meet others. I have no desire to try anything new. I may start using substances to help control my emotions. I tend to deal with problems in less constructive and damaging ways

Because of these combined physiological and psychological responses, your brain patterns and thinking become conditioned to interpret most situations as a threat even when the likelihood of harm or risk is low or relatively moderate.

Living persistently like this can and does increase our risk of developing an **Anxiety Disorder**.



## Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

This is an illness where we find ourselves worrying about almost everything in our lives, for example family, money and health. Whilst it is quite normal to worry about those things from time to time, with GAD we would be worrying most of the time, even when there appears to be no reason to worry, and we find that we are unable to control those feelings.

The symptoms need to be prevalent for at least six months, which may seem like a long time but will allow your GP to assess if these symptoms have been there more times than not over a six month period.

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