



Mental Health Information - Anxiety

We all experience anxiety at some time. It's a natural response, helping us to avoid dangerous situations and motivating us to solve everyday problems. Anxiety can vary in severity from mild uneasiness through to a terrifying panic attack.

There are many types of anxiety disorders. The main ones are generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, phobic disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Signs and symptoms

These are some of the common symptoms associated with anxiety. Not everyone will experience all of these.

Physical

- Feeling sick (nausea)
- Pins and needles
- Faster breathing
- Difficulty sleeping
- A fast, thumping or irregular heart beat
- Churning in the pit of your stomach
- Tense muscles and headaches
- Feeling light headed or dizzy
- Sweating or hot flushes
- Raised blood pressure
- Needing the toilet more frequently, or less frequently
- Experiencing panic attacks

Mental

- Mind is busy with thoughts
- Dwelling on negative experience or thinking over a situation again and again
- Poor concentration

Changes in behaviour

- Feeling tense, nervous and on edge
- Feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down
- Feeling restless
- Sense of dread or fearing the worst
- Feeling like other people can see your symptoms
- Feeling numb

Panic attacks

Someone having a panic attack will have several of these symptoms at the same time;

- Increased awareness of heartbeat
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed or faint
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Fear of dying
- Chills or hot flushes
- Sweating
- Feeling of choking, shortness of breath or smothering
- Nausea
- Trembling or shaking
- Numbness, tingling, or pins and needles
- Feeling of unreality or detachment from themselves or their surroundings

Once someone's had a panic attack they often fear they'll have another one so they may avoid places where the attacks have occurred.

There are some medical conditions with symptoms similar to a panic attacks – for examples arrhythmias of the heart or asthma attack. It's important that you see a doctor to find out whether it was a panic attack or if you've got another health condition.

Helping someone who's having a panic attack

1. If you're not sure if the person is having a panic attack, a heart attack or an asthma attack – call an ambulance
2. If you're sure it's a panic attack, move them to a quiet safe place is possible
3. Help calm them by encouraging slow relaxed breathing by doing this yourself. Encourage them to breathe in for 3 seconds, hold for 3 seconds and then breathe out for 3 seconds
4. Be a good listener, without judging
5. Explain to them that they're having a panic attack, and not something life-threatening like a heart attack.
6. Explain that the attack will stop and they will fully recover

7. Reassure them that someone will stay with them and keep them safe until the attack stops.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD can develop if you've been through or witnessed a distressing event.

Symptoms

- Re-experiencing the trauma – recurring dreams of the event, flashbacks
- Avoiding things associated with the traumatic event
- Reduced interest in others and the outside world
- Emotional numbing, being less able to experience a full range of emotions
- Anxiety in situations that bring back memories of the trauma
- Being constantly on-edge – jumpiness / being easily startled

Where you can get help

Your GP can help by;

- Checking there's no physical condition causing your symptoms
- Helping you understand what's causing your anxiety
- Giving you self-help strategies
- Arranging for ongoing appointments for counselling and support
- Referring you to other professional who can offer more specialist assessment

Other sources of support

- **Anxiety UK** – provide information, support and therapy for people living with anxiety disorders.
www.anxietyuk.org.uk
Call - 0844 4077 5774
- **No Panic** - aims to help relieve and rehabilitate people suffering panic attacks, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorders and other related anxiety disorders.
www.nopanic.org.uk
Call - 0800 138 8889
- **OCD Action** - provides information and support for people with obsessive compulsive disorders.
www.ocdaction.org.uk
Call - 0845 390 6232
- **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**
If you need support or just someone to talk to, the Co-op Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is available 24 hours a day. If you're in the UK, you can call 0800 069 8854 (calls are free). If you're abroad, you can call 0044 141 846 1586 (overseas call charges apply). It's run by LifeWorks – a company that specialises in colleague helplines. It's totally confidential and they don't need to know which part of Co-op you work in.

- www.getselfhelp.co.uk
Offers free CBT self-help information and resources, including therapy worksheets