Managing Anxiety
A Self-Help Guide
What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a perfectly normal response that we all experience when we feel under threat and believe we won’t be able to cope. Threats come in lots of different forms, like sitting an exam, going into hospital or attending a job interview. Although it doesn’t always feel like it, anxiety can be helpful in certain situations as it prompts us to prepare to face the threat and can help our performance.

However, anxiety can become a problem when it is experienced at an intense level, is long lasting and impacts on our ability to lead the life we want to. If you feel that this is the case for you, this self-help guide will help you to:

- Understand why we experience anxiety;
- Recognise the symptoms of anxiety;
- Learn tools and techniques to manage your symptoms; and
- Know where to go to ask for more help.
Common Symptoms of Anxiety

We are all unique, and each of us experiences anxiety in a different way. However, most people will notice changes in their body, the way they think, feel and behave when experiencing anxiety. You may be able to relate to some of the following symptoms, which are common to sufferers of anxiety:

Physical/Bodily Symptoms
- Shaking
- Butterflies in stomach
- Racing heart
- Breathlessness
- Hot or cold Sweats
- Urgency to relieve your bladder or bowels
- Restlessness
- Feeling tense
- Painful or tight chest
- Dizzy or light headed
- Tiredness
- Less interest in sex
- Loss of concentration
- Altered appetite

Behavioural symptoms (what we do or avoid don’t do)
- Avoiding certain places/things
- Procrastination
- Withdraw socially
- Smoking or drinking more
- Becoming snappy or irritable
- Avoid Making Decisions
- Reassurance Seeking

Changes in our thinking:
- Worrying about the past, the future (‘what if’ thinking)
- Assuming the worst case scenario will happen
- Racing thoughts
- Fearful of anxiety symptoms and what might happen (e.g. I’m going to faint, I’m going to have a heart Attack)
- Thoughts about not coping and or losing control

Although the symptoms of anxiety are really unpleasant and overwhelming, they are not harmful or dangerous to us. Understanding more about them and learning techniques to manage the anxiety may help you to feel more in control of the symptoms.

What causes anxiety?

There are a range of factors which influence whether we will struggle with anxiety; these include the following:

- Having an anxious personality.
- Being bought up in a household with others who experience anxiety may result in us learning to worry and not learning ways to manage stress.
- Stressful life events increase our risk of anxiety; these may be early life experiences or current ones (e.g. bereavement, starting a new job, moving house, financial difficulty).
Understanding Anxiety:

The Fight or Flight Response

When we are faced with danger, our bodies respond automatically in order to deal with the danger and to protect us. This automatic response is often called the fight or flight response and links back to our ancestors, who were faced with tangible and physical threats such as wild boar. The way that our bodies respond is not a coincidence – it is an ancient survival mechanism and means that our bodies are ready either to fight the danger we are faced with or to run away from it.

If you are crossing the road and suddenly a bus comes around the corner straight towards you, your fight/flight response will be triggered without you even thinking about it. This is to protect you and to help you survive – your body gets ready to help you to run away from the bus (or to fight it) and this automatic reaction may be the difference between life and death.

When faced with this bus or any other perceived danger, some of these things may occur in your body. This list may help you to understand why some of the horrible symptoms you experience happen:

- Adrenaline is released (body can shake)
- Muscles tense to allow you to run faster and hit harder (headaches, muscle tension);
- Blood is pumped (racing heart) to your muscles and away from the stomach. (butterflies in stomach);
- Start sweating more (increased sweating) to cool your body down in preparation for fight or flight
- Blood vessels dilate( blushing)
- More oxygen is needed in muscles and lungs (breathlessness/faster breathing);
- Your body gets rid of any waste material to make it lighter and faster (upset stomach, needing to go to the loo more than usual)
- Your digestion slows down to allow the energy to be focussed on more useful areas for fight/flight (dry mouth, nausea, indigestion).

What maintains anxiety?

You may notice that anxiety remains a problem even after the event which set it off has passed. This is because when we are facing stressful life events we can start to think and behave differently. These changes in our thinking and behaviour can keep anxiety going.

Example: Sarah has been asked to deliver a presentation; she is anxious when in groups of people and so public speaking is something she fears.

The diagram below illustrates how a relationship between Sarah’s thoughts, physical symptoms, emotions and behaviour are keeping a vicious cycle of anxiety going.

### Situation:
Delivering a presentation to her colleagues about what she learnt from a training event she went to.

### Behaviour (what you do or don’t do):
- Wear my hair down to try and hide the redness in my cheeks.
- Spend hours preparing to make sure I definitly know everything so I can answer any questions.
- Spoke really quickly when presenting to get it done and in hope that if I made a mistake it would not be noticed.

### Thoughts:
- I am going to forget what to feedback
- I am going to say something silly
- People will notice I am anxious and will think I don’t know what I am talking about.

### Physical symptoms:
- Flushed cheeks and neck
- Nausea
- Heart racing

### Emotions:
- Anxiety
- Nervous
To understand what may be maintaining your anxiety, try and think about a situation in the last two weeks in which you noticed yourself feeling particularly anxious. It may be a situation that you avoided, left early or went to but struggled to manage your anxiety.

**Draw out your own vicious cycle for this situation:**

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<th>Situation:</th>
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<th>Thoughts:</th>
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<th>Emotions:</th>
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<th>Physical symptoms:</th>
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<th>Behaviour (what you do or don't do):</th>
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**Ways to manage your anxiety**

As we have said the fight or flight response is an automatic one that seems to happen out of our control. Despite this, there are things we can do to help with our anxiety and to start to manage it. Some of these techniques may seem relatively simple, but can have a huge impact on the symptoms of anxiety.

**Managing Physical Symptoms:**

**Making Lifestyle changes:**

**Caffeine:**

Tea, coffee, energy drinks, Coke, Pepsi, chocolate and some flu and cold medication include caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant which means that it can increase the symptoms of anxiety, as well as affecting our sleep. If you feel that caffeine may be impacting on your symptoms, you may like to consider cutting down. Try substituting caffeinated drinks for decaffeinated teas and coffees, herbal teas, squash or water. If you do decide to drink less caffeine, the recommendation is to cut it down gradually as stopping suddenly may give you unpleasant withdrawal symptoms.

**Diet and Exercise**

Both eating a healthy diet, and doing regular exercise, is important for many different aspects of our health, including our mental health. Eating regular, healthy meals and staying active can help with anxiety.

**Balance in life**

We all need a balance in our lives, with a variety of different activities, including **those that give us pleasure** a sense of achievement and those that give us a feeling of closeness to others. When one of these areas takes over at the expense of one of the others, this can have a negative impact on our mental health. You may like to think about the different activities in your life and whether you have a good enough
Controlled Breathing

Anxiety can affect your breathing. People often tend to "over-breathe" when they are very anxious, and our breathing can become shallow and fast. This is due to the fight-or-flight response that we talked about earlier preparing the body for physical exertion.

The following side effects can occur (tick those that apply):

- Light-headedness
- Feeling faint
- Dizziness
- Tingling sensations in the hands or feet
- Visual changes

Breathing is much more effective when we use our diaphragms, rather than with our chest.

- Sit comfortably in a chair and place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen.
- As you breathe in, notice which hands moves the most. Begin to practice so that your lower hand on your abdomen moves and you breathe in and out, rather than the hand on your chest. Often people think it should be their tummy that draws in as they breathe in, however it should be the opposite.

If you notice you are feeling tense, try breathing out a little more slowly and deeply, and notice a short pause before breathing in. You may find it helpful to count slowly or to use a word such as "relax" or "peace" to help extend the out-breath a little, and you can say this to yourself or out loud.

Aim for 8-12 breaths a minute. Relax your shoulders as this reduces the chance of hyperventilation. As with all of these techniques, you will need to practice and work at it.

Relaxation

As we have discussed, anxiety affects our bodies physically in a number of ways, and often we end up with tense muscles as a result of it. This tension in our muscles can contribute to us getting headaches, or backache. Using relaxation techniques can address this tension. We all relax in different ways, some people may use exercise, listening to music, yoga, reading etc.

Make a list of activities you engage in that help you to relax. You may find it helpful to monitor what activities you do over the week and how relaxed you feel after engaging in them (0= not relaxed at all and 10= very relaxed). You could also consider things you have done in the past that you may like to get back to doing.

There is a type of relaxation exercise which helps address muscular tension and this is called Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

Progressive muscle relaxation

What is it?

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) involves working through different parts of your body tensing certain muscles for approximately 5 seconds and then releasing the tension. Please do this without straining. You do not need to exert yourself, just contract each muscle firmly but gently as you breathe in. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can simply relax and breathe normally. The aim of doing this is to increase awareness of when we may be holding tension in our body so we can release it. This is a skill, so may take a while to learn. If we can relax our body our mind should follow.

Where should I do it?

When practising PMR it is important to find a quiet, warm, comfortable space where you are unlikely to be interrupted. You may choose to sit in a comfortable chair, or lie down on a bed or on the floor. If you do become aware of sounds just try to put them out of mind as soon as they enter.

How often should I practise?

Try to practise it regularly, every day if you can.
Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script

Detailed below is a Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script.

However, it may be difficult to read the script whilst also trying to relax. It is likely to be easier to listen to an audio version which can be found on our website; http://www.covwarkpt.nhs.uk/dont_panic/Pages/relaxation.aspx

- Don't play the files whilst driving.
- If you have any back or muscular problems, ask your GP for advice before using these.
- At first, play the files when you feel fairly calm, your concentration will be better and you will pick up the skill more quickly.
- You only need to tense the muscle enough to notice a feeling of tension, do not tense it to the extent that it causes pain.

Script:

- Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down that is free from distraction. Let your hands rest loosely in your lap or by your sides. Now close your eyes.
- Become aware of your breathing, and notice how your abdomen rises and falls with each breath... Take a long slow deep breath in through your nose, all the way down into your stomach. Hold the breath for just a moment, and then exhale through your mouth. Allow your breath to carry away all stress and tension as the air floods out of your lungs. You may notice your body starting to release tension. Let your breathing rhythm return to normal...and relax....
- Begin with clenching your right fist and hold that tension for 5 seconds as your are clenching study the tension in your right wrist, hand and forearm and then relax. Let the fingers of your right hand become lose and observe the contrast between how it felt to tense the muscles and to relax them. Repeat this once more. Now do the same with your left fist and relax.
- Allow your breathing to relax, slow down and become rhythmic and relaxed.
- Now clench both fists, study the tension in your wrists, hands and forearms, study the sensations, feel the tension and relax, straighten out your fingers and feel that relaxation. Continue relaxing your hand and forearms more and more.
- Now bend your elbows and tense your upper arms and study the tension feeling and now straighten out your arms let them relax and feel that difference again. And once more tense your upper arms, hold the tension, hold it and release by straightening your arms and relax.
- Then straighten your arms so that you feel tension run down the muscles in the back of your arms, stretch your arms and feel the tension and now relax. Put your arms back into a comfortable position, your arms should feel comfortably heavy as you allow them to relax and repeat this process once more. Just focus on pure relaxation in your arms and get rid of any tension. Ensure your arms are back in a comfortable position, allowing them to relax, further and further.
- Again concentrate on relaxing your breathing. Slow down your breathing so it becomes nice and relaxed. Allow yourself to feel more and more relaxed. Let all your muscles go loose and heavy.
- Just settle back quietly and comfortably, wrinkle up your forehead tightly, and then relax your forehead allowing it to smooth out picture your forehead and scalp becoming smoother. Now frown and crease your brows and study the tension, hold it, hold it and then let your forehead smooth out.
- Next close your eyes tighter and tighter feel the tension around the eyes hold it for 5 seconds and let it go. Keep your eyes closed gently and notice the relaxation and enjoy it.
- Now clench your jaws by biting your teeth together study the tension throughout the jaw and let the tension go. Let your lips part slightly and enjoy the relaxation.
- Now press your tongue hard against the roof of your mouth look for the tension and let the tension go. Let your tongue return to a comfortable and relaxed position.
- Now purse your lips, purse them tighter and feel that tension and then let it go. Note the contrast between tension and relaxation. Feel the relaxation all over your face, scalp, forehead, eyes, jaw, lips, tongue and throat.
- Now attend to your neck muscles, press your head back as far as it can go and feel the tension in the neck. Role it to the right and feel the tension shift, now role it to the left, straighten your head and bring it forward press your chin against your chest and let your head return to a comfortable position and study the relaxation, just let the relaxation develop.
- Next shrug your shoulders, push them up as high as they can go hold the tension and then drop them and feel the relaxation. Once again push your shoulders up but then role them forward, then backwards and feel the tension in your shoulders and upper back. Drop them down once more and relax. Let the relaxation spread into the shoulders, back, beck and throat, jaws and let your face become more and more relaxed. And again concentrate on slowing down your breathing, let it slow down so it helps your body to relax more and more. Just try to relax your entire body to the best of your ability. Just feel that comfortable heaviness that goes along with relaxation. And breathe easily and freely, in and out.
- Notice how the relaxation increase as you breath out, as you breath out just feel that relaxation and then breathe in deeply fill your lungs breathe in deeply, hold your breathe and study the tension and then breathe out, let the walls of your chest grow loose and push the air out automatically. Continue relaxing and breathing easily and gently.
- With the rest of your body as relaxed as possible fill your lungs again, breathe in deeply and hold it again. Breathe out and appreciate the difference, just breathe normally, continue relaxing your chest and let the relaxation spread to your back, shoulders, neck and arms. Just let go and enjoy the relaxation.
- Tighten your stomach muscles, study that tension and then relax. Let the muscles loosen and notice the contrast and repeat this once more.
- Next draw your stomach in and feel the tension this way and then relax, let your stomach out, continue breathing normally and easily. Now push the stomach out and notice the tension and relax.
Managing Unhelpful Thoughts

When anxious we often engage in a lot of “what if?” thinking, predicting that something bad will happen and that we won’t cope. We may not always be aware of our unhelpful thoughts as they come into our mind automatically. To address our negative automatic thoughts we first need to be aware of when we are having them and their role in how we feel and what we do. Keeping the below thought diary can help us to do this. It is best to fill it out as soon as you notice you have become anxious. When feeling anxious try and take a step back and ask yourself the questions at the bottom of the thought diary columns.

Example: Sarah’s thought diary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation/Trigger</th>
<th>Feelings/ emotions (Rate 0-100% intensity)</th>
<th>Body sensations</th>
<th>Unhelpful thoughts/ images (Rate how much you believed the thought 0-100%)</th>
<th>Behaviour/What did you do/or not do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Delivering a presentation to her colleagues about what she learnt from a training event she went to.</td>
<td>Anxious (70%) Nervous (80%) Physical symptoms: Feel hot and sweaty Flushed cheeks and neck Nausea Heart racing Tired</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I am going to forget what feedback (70%) I am going to say something silly (60%) People will notice I am anxious and will think I don’t know what I am talking about. (70%)</td>
<td>Wear my hair down to try and hide the redness in my cheeks. Spend hours preparing to make sure I definitely know everything so I can answer any questions. Spoke really quickly when presenting to get it done and in hope that if I made a mistake it would not be noticed. Scan the audience for signs that people may be laughing at me or disinterested. Rushed off after the presentation</td>
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</table>

My Thought Diary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation/Trigger</th>
<th>Feelings/ emotions (Rate 0-100% intensity)</th>
<th>Unhelpful thoughts/ images (Rate how much you believed the thought 0-100%)</th>
<th>Behaviour/What did you do/or not do</th>
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</table>
Challenging our unhelpful thoughts:

Our thoughts are often assumptions that are not based on factual evidence. It can be helpful to take a step back and assess how accurate and helpful our thoughts are and to come up with an alternative balanced perspective. If we start to see things in a more balanced way our emotional reaction will reduce and we will feel more able to face situations and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought on trial: I am going to forget what to feedback</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much you believe this thought to be true: 70 %</td>
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Developing an argument

Prosecution: Evidence to suggest the thought is inaccurate

- I have the slides from the training event, so I can refer back to these
- People tell me I have a good memory
- I found the training interesting and have already talked about what I learnt with one of my colleagues.

The Defence: Evidence to suggest the thought is accurate

- I have been to a meeting before and tried to answer a question asked, my anxiety caused me to get flustered and made me lose my train of thought.

Alternative Balanced Perspective (Think about how a Judge may summarise the above evidence in order to develop a new perspective which is based on the factual evidence above).

- I am likely to feel anxious when feeding back the training. I do understand the material I need to present and if I lose my way I have the slides as a prompt.

Rate how much you believe your existing thought and your new balanced perspective?

| Belief in original thought: 40 % | Belief in new balanced perspective 50 % |

Use the below table to help challenge your unhelpful thoughts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought on trial:</th>
<th>How much you believe this thought to be true: %</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Developing an argument

Prosecution: Evidence to suggest the thought is inaccurate

The Defence: Evidence to suggest the thought is accurate

Alternative Balanced Perspective (Think about how a Judge may summarise the above evidence in order to develop a new perspective which is based on the factual evidence above).

Rate how much you believe your existing thought and your new balanced perspective?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief in original thought:</th>
<th>Belief in new balanced perspective</th>
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As we start to view situations differently it is important that we also change how we act in these situations in order to strengthen our new way of thinking. Spend some time thinking about how you may behave differently if faced with that situation again.
The following questions can be used to help build an argument for the defence or the prosecution:

Is there any factual evidence to support your thought?
Have I had any experiences which tell me that this thought is not accurate?
Are there other situations which prove this thought is not completely true?
If I was not feeling anxious would I view this situation differently, and if so how?
Are there any strengths or positives in me or the situation that I am ignoring?
What might a friend say about this?
Am I blaming myself for something I do not have complete control over?
Am I jumping to conclusions?
Am I predicting the future?
Am I assuming I know what others think?
Will this matter in a week's, months or a years' time?
What are the chances of that happening?

Worry Management:

We all worry, however, when anxious we can often find ourselves worrying about different things and can find it hard to switch off from and control our worries. This can leave us feeling tense, irritable, unable to sleep and can impact on the level of enjoyment we experience when doing activities.

Categorising our worries:

Worry is helpful if it brings our attention to something that we need to address and can solve. These types of worries are Practical worries (e.g. worrying about an unpaid bill). Worry is less helpful when we engage in “What if” worries about the future that we can not come up with a practical solution for at the time. These type of worries are called Hypothetical Worries. (e.g. What if I go to the party and nobody talks to me).

By categorising your worries it helps identify which ones are worth spending energy on (the practical ones) and which ones you need to let go of.

The diagram on the next page can help with worry categorisation.

Distraction
If you are feeling anxious, it can help to take your mind off the symptoms by using distraction techniques. You could try paying specific attention to your surroundings – noticing sounds around you and smaller things that you may not normally notice, such as posters on the wall or the colour of the cars passing you. It will probably take at least three minutes for the symptoms of anxiety to die down, so you will need to be patient and persistent with your distraction techniques.
Worry Time:

We can boundary the amount of time we give to worrying which can then leave us feeling that we control worry instead of it controlling us, this technique is called Worry time.

Step 1: Schedule Worry time

- Schedule 20 minutes at the same time each day in which you are allowed to worry. (e.g. at 6pm).

Step 2: Write your worries down

- For the rest of the day when having a worry you can write it down and tell yourself I will come back to this in worry time. This allows you to focus on your daily activities and enjoy them more. Ensure you have a pen and paper with you to offload your worries on to, or alternatively store them on your phone.
- If you are someone whose mind races when trying to get to sleep or when waking in the night, make sure you have paper by the side of the bed to offload worries on to.
- Start with a fresh piece of paper to record your worry list on each day

Step 3: Focus on the here and now

- Once you have written a worry down try and focus your attention on the here and now (what you are doing, what you can hear, smell, touch, taste, see). To shift your focus it may help to change activity or surroundings.

Step 4: Worry Time

- Get out your worry list and cross through any worries that no longer need your attention (i.e. those that are no longer an issue). For example, maybe you worried about been late into work and you arrived on time.
- Then sort the worries into categories, are they Practical or Hypothetical worries (Use Page 19 to help with this)
- During worry time you can worry as much as you like about hypothetical worries but once the time is up try let these worries go.
- Address Practical Worries using the Problem Solving Information on Page 21.
- Spend some time reflecting on the worries you wrote down. Ask yourself were they realised and if so, how did you cope? Do you feel as anxious about a worry as you did when recording it down.

Problem solving

When anxious it can be difficult to think clearly. The steps below can help us structure our thinking when trying to address Practical worries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the problem to be worked on?</th>
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<tr>
<td>What are our options? Let's weigh them up—use another sheet of paper if needed</td>
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<tr>
<th>What are the possible solutions?</th>
<th>Positives of option</th>
<th>Negatives of option</th>
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<td>Solution 1:</td>
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<td>Solution 4:</td>
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Let's make a plan and….

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<th>Which option are we going to try first?</th>
<th>What do we need to put this plan in action?</th>
<th>Do we need to get help from anyone? Do we need to do or have anything first?</th>
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Do it!

How did it go? – What went well? What could have been done differently? Do we need to change the plan slightly and try again or do we need to try a different solution?

If you need to use another solution, you already have a few worked out.
Changing our Behaviour:

It is recognised that symptoms of anxiety are unpleasant and can be frightening so it makes sense why we may avoid things which trigger our anxiety. We may avoid particular activities, places, objects, etc. Another thing we may do is to avoid making decisions or taking responsibility for things in our work or home life.

When we avoid doing something we get a sudden decrease in the intensity of our anxiety symptoms and experience a sense of relief (e.g. We avoid going to the supermarket by shopping online). This is helpful in the short term but in the long term fuels our anxiety and erodes our self confidence and self esteem. The sense of relief we feel is likely to motivate us to avoid a similar situation again in the future. By avoiding or escaping our fears we do not get to find out whether we would have coped and do not get chance to assess the accuracy of our thoughts about that situation (e.g. If I go to the party nobody will talk to me. If we don't go we will never know if we were right to think this). The next time we have to face the avoided situation we likely to feel as anxious.

Unfortunately as our confidence lessens the number of situations or things we avoid doing may increase and our world can start to feel smaller and smaller, which can leave us feeling low in mood and isolated.

Exposure therapy can help us to start facing our fears and in turn help build confidence in our ability to cope. It involves exposing ourselves to our feared situations in a gradual way so that it feels more manageable. It is often believed that if we stay in a feared situation that our anxiety levels will continue to rise and will remain really intense. Through exposure therapy what you will learn is that actually a process of habituation occurs as our anxiety symptoms gradually reduce as we remain in our feared situation.

If you are a driver, you may have noticed a process of habituation in your anxiety levels from when you had your first lesson to when you were going on your 10th lesson.

The more times we face our feared situation the less intense the anxiety will be to start with and the less time it will take to reduce.

There are 4 key rules to follow when using Exposure therapy

Rule 1: Graded: Once you have decided which feared situation you want to address have a think about your end goal and what you would like to be able to do. Put this at the top of your hierarchy under the most feared category. Then spend some time thinking about steps you could take to reach the end goal and find a manageable starting point. Use the sheet on Page 25 to help you do this.

Rule 2: Prolonged: Once you have identified a step you want to take you will need to make time to action this. It is important that when carrying out the exposure exercise that you remain in the feared situation long enough for you to notice that your anxiety level has reduced by 50%. This may take some time, but it is important you stay and ride it out to notice that anxiety symptoms will reduce.

Rule 3: Repeated: It is important that you stick with the same step on your hierarchy until you have noticed that you are less anxious before facing the situation and the anxiety is less intense when initially entering into the situation. Once you feel the anxiety is now at a manageable level you can consider moving on to the next step.

Exposure therapy does take a lot of commitment. You will need to set time aside to repeat the exposure Step as many times as is reasonably possible within a week. Just try your best and be kind to yourself.

Rule 4: Dropping Safety Behaviours:

When a situation makes us feel anxious, we may only face that situation under certain conditions (e.g. when its quiet, when we can get a seat by the door) or if we have certain people or items with us (e.g. a bottle of water, our mobile phone, rescue remedy). This can help us feel safer but actually it can maintain our anxiety in the long run. We may believe the only reason we coped with the situation is because we had our safety props or safe person with us, where as perhaps we would have coped without them. It is important to try and identify your own safety behaviours, as working towards reducing these will be beneficial in the long term. Try include dropping safety behaviours as part of the steps in your hierarchy (e.g. one step may be to go to the supermarket with a friend, then next step could be to try and do part of the shop without them next to you).
Exposure Therapy:

The first step is recognising what you have started to avoid doing. Make a list of these things below:

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Now try and priorities what is most important to you to address first or what might be an easier thing to start with.

Once you have decided what you want to address first try and think about your end goal and the small steps you make take towards reaching this goal.

It may be helpful to think about things that will influence the level anxiety you may experience when taking a step towards your goal. (e.g. time of day, how busy somewhere might be, whether it is a familiar or unfamiliar place, who is with you).

Modifying factors:

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Exposure Hierarchy

Most difficult Steps:
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Medium difficult Steps:
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Least difficult Steps:
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Planning and monitoring exposure tasks:

It is important to plan in when you will be able to do an exposure task to ensure that it remains on the agenda and that you have a chance to repeat the exposure task. Reflecting on your learning from doing the task is also beneficial. The table below allows you to plan in your exposure tasks and to monitor your level of anxiety before starting the task, at the beginning and at the end. This will allow you to see how your anxiety changes as you remain in your feared situation. The column which asks you to put down the duration should be filled out after the task is completed. Remember you have to stay in the situation long enough for your anxiety to reduce by 50%. With repeated exposure to a situation you should notice that the time needed for the anxiety to reduce will decrease.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Exposure Task</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>At the Start</th>
<th>At the end</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 20th of June at 10:00 | Ask my close friends to come to my house for a catch up | 50% | 80% | 60% | 1 hour | I was nervous when people started to arrive, but once everyone was settled and started talking I did start to calm down.

Anxiety Scale:

- No Anxiety: 0
- Mild Anxiety: 25%
- Moderate Anxiety: 50%
- Severe Anxiety: 75%
- Panic: 100%

Medication:

At IAPT we do not prescribe medication and we do not insist that you take or stop medication. Instead we can provide you with information to help you make an informed choice.

**What medications are prescribed?**

It is not uncommon for people to experience both symptoms of anxiety and depression. Some antidepressants can be prescribed to help with symptoms of depression and anxiety. The most widely used antidepressants are called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) and Selective Noradrenaline Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs). Although they were prescribed more in the past, earlier antidepressants such as Tricyclics are still prescribed where clinically indicated.

- Benzodiazepines are a category of drugs that can be prescribed to help with anxiety and sleep problems. A common drug from this category is Diazepam. They aim to have a calming effect.
- Beta Blockers are a category of drugs which help address the physical symptoms of anxiety and panic.
- Another category of drugs which may be prescribed are Selective Noradrenaline Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs) and Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs). These drugs are still prescribed where clinically indicated.

How does antidepressant medication work?

There is research that has found a relationship between depression and a reduction in the level of certain chemicals in the brain. These chemicals are known as neurotransmitters and there role is to transmit messages between nerve cells in the brain. Serotonin and Noradrenaline are two of the neurotransmitters which are involved in our mood and emotions. It has been suggested that reductions in the level of these neurotransmitters contribute to depression. Antidepressants are used to increase the levels of these neurotransmitters, thereby helping to relieve the symptoms of depression.
How long will I have to take them for?
When starting to feel better it can be tempting to stop taking medication. It is suggested to keep taking them for six months following feeling better. Stopping sooner can increase the chances of relapse.

What might put people off taking medication?
People may stop taking antidepressants completely or take less than prescribed for a number of reasons. Some possibilities may be due to beliefs that antidepressants are; ineffective, not helpful, cause side effects, concerns about addiction, concerns about safety, family oppose it or because they forgot to renew prescription. Like with all medications, some types may suit one person more than another. It may take a few tries to get the type and medication right. Please talk to your GP if you have any concerns.

Side effects: Like other types of medications you may experience some side effects from your medication, however, these usually subside within 7-10 days of taking the medication. However, if you are concerned about the side effects you are experiencing, do discuss them with your doctor.

Antidepressants are NOT addictive but, like other medication need to be taken as advised. It is not advised to stop taking your medication suddenly as you may experience discontinuation effects like anxiety, dizziness and poor sleep. If you decide you no longer want to take your medication, discuss this with your GP who can support you to come off medication gradually.

If you are interested to read further information on medication, there are many information materials available. Organisations such as MIND, Rethink and the Mental Health Foundation provide clear leaflets and booklets. Also we would recommend that you speak to your GP for any further advice around medication.

Staying Well Plan:
The aim of this booklet was to help you understand more about your anxiety and to teach strategies to help manage it. Going forward it is really important to be your own therapist, making time to reflect on how your are feeling and addressing any issues that arise. By devising a ‘Staying Well Plan’ you have a “go to” document which can remind you of things to look out for and to do to help your psychological wellbeing.

When referring to IAPT for support my main difficulties were:

Difficult Situations:

Thoughts:

Emotions:

Physical Symptoms:

Behaviour:

I have learnt that the following things are important for my wellbeing:

The techniques I found most useful were:

To prevent a setback I will need to:

I will know my mood has deteriorated if I notice the following Early Warning Signs:
How to get help

If you feel that anxiety is a problem for you and you are over 16, registered with a Coventry or Warwickshire GP and are ready to make changes in your life, IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) might be able to help you. The IAPT service helps people with anxiety, depression, low mood, panic attacks, phobias and stress to build on their strengths and to learn new coping skills by using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques.

If you would like to refer yourself to the IAPT service, please phone 024 7667 1090 (open Monday to Friday 9am to 4.30pm, excluding bank holidays). We will take your details and book you in for an assessment with one of our therapists to agree the best way forward to get the help you need.

If you are having thoughts of ending your life or of harming yourself, you should start by going to your GP, who will be able to talk to you about this.

You could also contact a helpline:

If you live in Coventry and Warwickshire you can phone the Mental Health Matters helpline, who provide emotional support over the telephone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The 24 hour helpline number is 0800 616171 from a landline or 0300 330 5487 from a mobile.

The highly trained and experienced support workers use counselling skills to provide emotional guidance and information. You could phone them if:

- You are feeling low, anxious or stressed and feel talking to another person might help you cope.
- You are in extreme emotional distress and feel that there is nowhere else to turn; or
- You are caring for another person and finding it difficult to cope.

If you live in Solihull you can contact the Samaritans on 116 123.

Contacting a Helpline can give you a feeling of relief, wellbeing and peace of mind. You won’t be judged and the service is confidential unless they consider that there is a risk to yourself or others.