



Anxiety is one of the most common health issues for young people in Australia.



Anxiety is distressing, and it can stop you achieving your full potential, but it can be treated.

## What's anxiety?

'Anxiety' is like 'worry'. It's an unpleasant emotion that most people feel at some time when they're faced with challenges. Mild anxiety, like just before a sporting event or an exam, can help people perform at their best. But when anxiety becomes more intense, causes distress, lasts for a longer time and interferes with daily living, then it's a problem.

Physical feelings of anxiety include a faster heart rate, faster breathing, muscle tension, sweating, shaking, and 'butterflies in the stomach'. In a 'panic attack', these symptoms are very severe.

Other common symptoms of anxiety are:

- Persistent worrying and excessive fears
- Being unable to relax
- Avoiding challenging situations
- Excessive shyness
- Being socially isolated or withdrawn
- Trouble concentrating and paying attention
- Poor sleep
- Problems with work, social or family life

## Types of anxiety disorder

Some types of anxiety disorders include:

- **Generalised anxiety disorder:** Lots of worry about things, such as work, money, relationships
- **Specific phobias:** Intense fear of a particular situation or object, like spiders or small spaces. This fear often leads you to avoid the situation or object
- **Panic disorder:** Having panic attacks and worry about having another panic attack
- **Social phobia:** Continuing, excessive fear of being embarrassed in social situations, being judged badly by other people, or being criticised or 'put down'
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD):** Obsessions are unwanted thoughts, and compulsions are unwanted actions that can result. A common obsession is worry about dirt or contagious diseases. Common compulsions are hand-washing, counting objects and arranging things in a specific pattern
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** Symptoms can include 'replaying' unwanted memories in your mind, trouble sleeping, and checking for danger



# Anxiety

## Other problems

Many young people with anxiety problems also have symptoms of depression at the same time.

Some people with anxiety drink alcohol or take drugs to ease the discomfort or to make them feel more confident. This can make things worse in the long run, as it covers up the problem rather than dealing with it.

## Getting help for anxiety

Different types of anxiety disorder need slightly different treatment. One approach, used for people with panic disorder, social phobia and generalised anxiety disorder, is to talk about how your thoughts influence your emotions. For some people, medication is helpful as well.

- Tell your family and friends about your difficulties so they can support you
- Try to eat healthily, exercise and find ways to relax by listening to music, reading and doing activities that you enjoy
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs as they often make anxiety worse in the long run and can lead to addiction problems
- Seek some help from a doctor, psychologist or counsellor

## Helping someone with anxiety

A person with anxiety problems needs understanding and support. Anxiety can be improved with treatment, so it's important that the person gets professional help.

Be patient and listen to the person's fears and concerns, and take them seriously. It's not just a matter of telling them to 'calm down' – it's not that easy. Be prepared to seek help or support for yourself as well if you need it.

For more information, to find your nearest **headspace** centre or for online and telephone support visit **headspace.org.au**