

What can we do to cope with feelings of anxiety?



Anxiety is something we can all experience from time-to-time. There are lots of reasons why we get this feeling. It can be connected to a job, school, a relationship, social situations, how we feel about ourselves, or a change in our life.

If we don't know how to cope with our feelings of anxiety, they can get out of control and stop us from

doing the things we need or want to do. The more often and the longer we feel anxious, the more it can become a problem.

Dealing with anxiety can be hard. But there are some things we can do to manage these tough feelings.

Have a read through the following suggestions and find out what might work for you.

What can we do to cope with feelings of anxiety?

1. Focus on your breathing

When you're having anxious thoughts try focusing on your breathing, concentrating on the feeling of your body as you breathe in and out. It can help you control the thought.

4-7-8 breathing technique

Close your mouth and quietly breath in through your nose, counting to four in your head. Hold your breath and count to seven. Breathe out through your mouth, making a whoosh sound while counting to eight. Repeat three more times for a total of four breath cycles.

Some people find relaxation exercises work too, while others find [mindfulness](#) useful.

2. Get moving

Exercise is a good way of dealing with anxiety. Remember, activity doesn't have to be vigorous; try some gentle stretches, yoga, or seated exercises. Or just go for a walk. Going for a run, swimming, or taking part in a fitness class can give you something else to think about. It needs a bit of concentration, so takes your mind of the anxious thoughts. Any amount of exercise will help. Read more about how exercise can help improve our mental health [here](#).

3. Keep a diary

It's important that we don't try to ignore our worries. Taking the time to keep a record of what's happening in your life and how it's affecting you can help you understand what is triggering your feelings of anxiety. Knowing this can help you better prepare for and manage situations that may cause anxiety.

Sometimes it helps to give yourself a certain time of day to be your 'worry time'. It could be half an hour first thing in the morning for to sit with your worries and write them down in your diary. When that's out of the way, you can move on with the rest of your day. This can help you take control and stop anxiety getting in the way of what you want to do.

4. Challenge your thoughts

Anxiety can lead us to think about things over and over again in our brain. This is called 'rumination' and it's not helpful. When you catch yourself ruminating try to write down the thought and to challenge it. Is what you're worrying about likely to happen? Are you being realistic? Have you had similar thoughts which have not turned into reality? This can make it easier to challenge the thoughts and stop them from overwhelming you.

5. Get support for money worries

A common cause of anxiety is money. If you're worried about not being able to pay bills, are struggling to repay debt, or aren't sure if you can cover your family's living costs, seek help. Make sure you are claiming all the government supports that you're entitled to. You can also speak to an organisation such as Citizens Advice or StepChange. **On our website** we have advice on how to cope with cost-of-living pressures and information on where to get practical support.

6. Spend time in nature

We know that spending time in nature has a positive impact on our mental health. It can help us feel calmer and less stressed. This can be as simple as tending some flowers in a window box or going for a walk in the woods. Any amount of time doing this is good for us, but to really get the benefit, try to spend a significant period of time – maybe an hour or longer – when you can really connect with nature and immerse yourself. **Find out more about the benefits of nature on our website.**



7. Connect with people and talk about how you feel

Anxiety can feel very lonely. Connecting with other people can help a lot. Spend time with friends or meet other people through activities such as volunteering, sport or social clubs, or peer support groups. If you're able to talk to people about how you feel it can help to reduce your anxiety. Sometimes saying what's worrying you out loud can take away its power over you.

8. Try to get some quality sleep or rest

Resting and having a good night's sleep is hard when your head is full of worries but there are some things that can help. If anxious thoughts keep you awake, write them down in your diary. If sleep is still not coming, get up and have a drink (nothing with caffeine!) and wait until you're feeling more tired before going back to bed. Keeping a note in your diary of your sleep patterns, what time you went to bed, what you ate, how often you woke up etc can help you work out a routine that will help you get better quality sleep.



9. Try to eat a healthy diet

For many of us, feeling anxious might cause us to reach for sugary snacks, junk food or alcohol. It's important that we don't turn to unhealthy foods or drinks as a way to cope as they will do more damage in the longer term. (Similarly, we should avoid smoking or taking recreational drugs.)

Eating healthy food regularly helps us to regulate our blood sugar and gives us the energy we need to live well. Remember caffeine in coffee, tea and fizzy drinks can affect your mood and cause sleep problems so it's best to have these in moderation and not too close to bedtime. **Find out more about how your diet is linked to good mental health.**

Further information and support

If your feelings of anxiety are not going away, are having a negative impact on your life, or often prevent you from doing things you need or want to do, seek support. Speak to your GP or healthcare professional about support available in your area or contact a helpline service.

- Mindfulness www.mentalhealth.org.uk/mindful
- Exercise www.mentalhealth.org.uk/physical-activity
- Cost of Living www.mentalhealth.org.uk/cost-of-living-support
- Nature www.mentalhealth.org.uk/nature
- Diet www.mentalhealth.org.uk/diet
- Helpline services www.mentalhealth.org.uk/get-help



Find out more about Mental Health Awareness Week
at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/MHAW