

WHAT IS.....

ANXIETY

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

Arming you with the knowledge and understanding of the little things

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is when we feel unease which is usually fuelled by fear, worry or that we are in some way under threat - the threat may be real, misinterpreted or imagined. It is normal to feel anxious in response to differing events at different times. Anxiety is a natural part of life given that we frequently find ourselves in unfamiliar territory or in situations which make us feel under pressure such as a new project or experiencing something for the first time. Anxiety can be very helpful. It can drive us to pay more attention, focus more sharply on the task at hand and raise our levels of alertness. Equally, however, too much anxiety is less helpful and can be harmful to our physical wellbeing, particularly if it goes on for a long time.

Why do we feel anxious?

We tend to get anxious when we perceive situations or people as threatening in some way. Anxiety usually becomes focused on potential future outcomes, and relates to uncertainty and the unknown. Anxiety is an 'on or off' phenomena; it's either there or it's not. It's like a physical switch, useful if there is real external threat by preparing our bodies to respond appropriately, to defend ourselves, or run away ('fight or flight') by mobilising energy and speeding our metabolism. The problem is, that even when the threat is not physical, or even real, our body reacts in the same way to negative thoughts by pumping adrenaline into our bloodstream which creates the uncomfortable feeling of unease. This unpleasant sensation reinforces our negative thoughts about threat which heightens our worry and can lead to a self-defeating negative spiral of anxiety.

Symptoms

Anxiety impacts on us in different ways psychologically. It affects our thinking, emotions, behaviours and how we feel physically. We have all experienced some of the signs of anxiety, most of them short-lived. Only when they are excessive or unremitting are they problematic:

Psychological symptoms:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Indecisiveness
- Worrying and racing thoughts
- Negative thought patterns
- Fearing the worst
- Being unable to stop thinking about certain events
- Catastrophic thinking
- Feeling powerless to change things
- Having lowered self-confidence and sense of being able to cope

Physical symptoms:

- Heart palpitations/pounding heart
- Increased muscular tension
- Reduced appetite
- Increased and shallow breathing
- Feeling nauseous or 'butterflies' in the tummy
- Headaches or feeling dizzy or faint
- Increased sweating
- Weak bladder
- Dry mouth

Emotional symptoms:

- Feeling irritable and 'on edge'
- Feeling unusually emotional and even tearful
- Inner tension and nervousness
- Excessive worry
- Feelings of dread
- Feeling detached
- Feeling apprehensive

Behaviours:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Not being able to settle and being fidgety and 'on edge'
- Smoking or drinking more
- Avoidance
- Withdrawal from life and others
- Seeking the reassurance of others