



# Anxiety

Anxiety is the most common mental health issue in Australia with one in four people suffering anxiety at some stage in their lives.

It is normal to feel a certain level of anxiety from time to time. In some situations, anxiety is even helpful – it enables us to perform under stress, alerts us to a potential threat, and helps prepare us to respond appropriately (via the fight, flight or freeze response). However, anxiety can become problematic when it is a frequent and dominant feature in your life and affects your ability to function at home or at work. Anxiety can take many forms including (but not limited to):

- **Panic attacks:** Short, very intense bursts of anxiety with physiological symptoms like a racing heart and trouble breathing.
- **Social anxiety:** A fear of embarrassment, or your performance being judged negatively by others.
- **Generalised anxiety:** Excessive worry about multiple everyday events that is persistent and uncontrollable.

## What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Recognising the symptoms of anxiety is the first step in understanding what you are experiencing and learning how to manage your symptoms.

We often think of anxiety as an emotion, characterised by fears, or a persistent worry that something unpleasant is going to happen. However, anxiety isn't just something we *feel* – it involves changes in the way that we think, the way that our body functions, and the way that we behave.

Emotions	Thoughts
Fear	"I can't get my mind to stop... it's driving me crazy"
Worry	"I won't be able to cope with..."
Irritability	"I'm weak to feel this way"
Frustration	"How do I get out of here?"
Guilt	"I just feel that something bad is going to happen"

Physical symptoms	Behaviour
Physically feeling on edge	Changes to normal sleep pattern
Muscle tension	Avoidance of situations or people
Shortness of breath	Lashing out at others
Sweating	Checking or counting behaviours
Racing heart	Difficulties with concentration and making decisions
Nausea	Social withdrawal
Dizziness	Using alcohol, illicit drugs, or pharmacy medications as a way to cope
Blurred/tunnel vision	Reduced work performance
Dry mouth	Hypervigilance
Temperature changes	
Hyperventilation	

## How can I manage my anxiety?

### Reducing anxiety in your body

Try simple exercises to reduce the tension in your body, and the physical symptoms of anxiety:

**Breathing Exercises:** Controlling your breath will help calm your nervous system when you feel anxious along with other symptoms such as hyperventilating and dizziness. Practice slow and controlled breaths for example breathing in for four, holding for four and out for four.

**Relaxation exercises:** Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) exercises can be effective in releasing tension in our body when we feel anxious.

### Reducing anxious thoughts

**Acknowledge your anxiety:** Anxiety is your body’s way of trying to protect you from a perceived danger. Step back from feeling afraid or self-critical about being anxious and remind yourself that anxiety is a survival mechanism that many people experience.

**Challenge your thinking:** Anxiety distorts our thinking so that we see the world through the lens of danger. Learning how to identify and challenge these kinds of thoughts can help you see things from a more balanced perspective.

**Practice mindfulness:** When we feel anxious, we are often caught in worried thoughts about what might happen in the future. Mindfulness exercises can help bring you ‘back into the moment’ and produce feelings of calm and relaxation. See <https://www.bluespacewellbeing.com.au/help-you/mindfulness> for more information.

## Challenging anxious behaviours

**Face your fears:** Avoiding situations or people that make you feel uncomfortable reinforces the idea that you won't be able to cope in this environment. With the right support and coping strategies, facing the situation whilst riding out anxious feelings can help to challenge this view of yourself and provide the proof that you can cope.

**Build a solid foundation:** Healthy eating, exercise and a regular sleep routine create a stable foundation that can increase your resilience to life stressors. Avoid overuse of alcohol and the use of illicit drugs, which can trigger or exacerbate anxiety symptoms.

**Connect to your support network:** Talk to the people in your life who care about you, plan activities with them to get you out of the house and share what is happening. Remember that anxiety is a common experience and it is likely that other people around you have gone through something similar.

## When should I seek help?

There are many evidence-based treatments for anxiety that are very effective in helping you manage your symptoms. Consider speaking to a healthcare professional if:

- Your anxiety is overwhelming, or it has been happening for an extended period of time.
- Anxiety is limiting your ability to do the things that you need or want to do.
- You feel that your social support network is not able to provide you with the support or care that you need.

Speak with your GP, who can exclude other causes of your symptoms, and talk with you about your treatment options.



**Alcohol and Drug  
Information Services VIC**  
1800 888 236



**Turning Point**  
[www.turningpoint.org.au](http://www.turningpoint.org.au)



**Police Wellbeing Services**  
1300 090 995