



Anxiety Disorders: A Guide for Young People

What is Anxiety?

Everyone knows what it is like to feel Anxious - butterflies in your stomach before an exam, feeling tense when someone is angry with you & the way your heart pounds when you're in danger. It is a normal response that helps people to gear up to face a threatening situation.

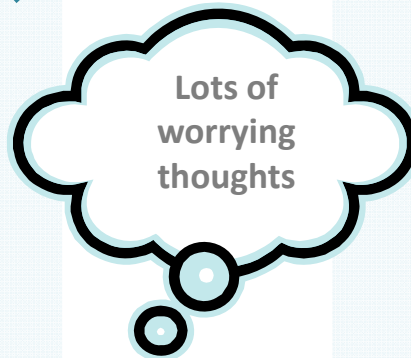
Anxiety is one of the **most common** things to affect our mental wellbeing. Although everyone feels anxiety differently, there are three main things that people experience:

1. Physical Signs

This might include:

- Shaking
- Sweating
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Tense muscles
- Feeling breathless
- Racing heart
- Dizziness
- Tummy aches
- Headaches
- Nausea

2. Changes in Thoughts



3. Changes in Behaviour

This might include:

- Avoiding friends
- Avoiding school or other situations
- Sometimes using drugs or alcohol
- Becoming overly eager to please others
- Feeling more on edge & irritated

What are Anxiety Disorders?

Sometimes, **Anxiety** can get out of hand & start to interfere with our lives. Health professionals call this an **Anxiety Disorder**, and it means that:

- You feel like you cannot control the anxiety
- The anxiety is very intense or stays around for a long time
- You start to avoid people or situations (such as school or work)
- It begins to affect your health or relationships with people you're close to.

It is common for people who are going through anxiety to also feel really down. If this starts to interfere with your life, or goes on for a longer than a few weeks, it is possible that you may also be experiencing **Depression** (see Fact Sheet on Depression).

What is Social Anxiety?

While it is very common for us to feel anxious in some social situations, **Social Anxiety** is a feeling of intense anxiety about the possibility that we may do something embarrassing or humiliating in front of other people. This anxiety may be a problem in certain situations (such as when you have to make a speech, when eating in front of others, or when you're around certain people). Social Anxiety can also be a general fear of being with people.

Blushing, feeling shaky, sweaty, tense & sick are common physical signs of anxiety when facing a social situation. You may be convinced that others have noticed this, which can make you more anxious. You might notice yourself avoiding eye contact, feeling unable to speak, mind going blank & wanting to stay close to familiar people.

People with Social Anxiety Disorder might also tend to have lots of negative thoughts about being around other people.

What is Generalised Anxiety Disorder?

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a **very common** type of anxiety. Generalised Anxiety can mean you feel extremely anxious for much of the day, on most days, over a long period of time (6 months or more). The worries can be hard to pinpoint but may be about how well you are getting on at school, in sport or with friends. You may try overly hard to fit in or to get things perfect & be very hard on yourself. Some people with GAD also worry a lot about bad things happening like getting really sick, someone dying, or about disasters like earthquakes or nuclear war.

What are Panic Attacks?

Panic Attacks are **very common** & can be associated with many types of anxiety. They usually begin in our teenage years but children can also experience panic attacks. When there are many panic attacks, people may be told they have **“Panic Disorder”**.

Panic Attacks are **intense feelings** & tend to be over within 10 minutes, though sometimes they can last longer. Panic attacks involve **physical signs** of anxiety including:

- Racing heart
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling like you’re choking
- Numbness or tingling
- Chest pain
- Feeling sick or nauseous
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Feeling unreal/detached
- Chills or hot flushes

A person may think that they are dying, having a heart attack, going crazy, or are about to lose control.



So you're Anxious or having Panic Attacks - What Now?

The first step is to contact your doctor (**General Practitioner**) or your local **Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service**. This will help you work out how your anxiety is affecting you, what things are making it worse and whether there is anything else going on (see Fact Sheet on Assessment).

The most commonly used **Treatment** involves **Psychotherapy (Talking Therapy)** & the length of treatment can vary depending on the individual needs of the young person. There is a Factsheet on **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**, which you might find helpful.

Medication can also be useful, particularly when the anxiety is difficult to manage or if a person is depressed.