



What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal part of life and is due to a set of bodily functions that have existed in us from our cave-man days.

Back then, we were equipped with an internal alarm system designed to protect us from the dangers surrounding us in the wild. This system would make us hyper-alert by giving us a boost of adrenaline that would increase the heart rate and boost the amount of oxygen going to our limbs so we were better able to fight or run from danger. This is known as the “fight or flight” response. The “butterflies in the stomach” feeling that many associate with anxiety is this mechanism kicking in, but instead of being used to avoid immediate danger, it is often wrongly and inappropriately activated in a person during normal, everyday situations when stress has built up, often unknowingly.

Anxiety is something that, at one time or another, most of us have probably experienced. Unfortunately, some people suffer from anxiety all the time and for them this can be extremely debilitating. Anxiety affects different people in different ways, both physically and psychologically.

Perhaps you have physically experienced some of the following:

- Increased heart rate
- Increased muscle tension
- “Jelly legs”
- Tingling in the hands and feet
- Hyperventilation (over breathing)
- Dizziness
- Difficulty in breathing
- Wanting to use the toilet more often
- Feeling sick
- Tight band across the chest area
- Tension headaches

- Hot flushes
- Increased perspiration
- Dry mouth
- Shaking
- Choking sensations
- Palpitations

Or perhaps you have experienced some of the following psychological (thoughts or altered perceptions) symptoms:

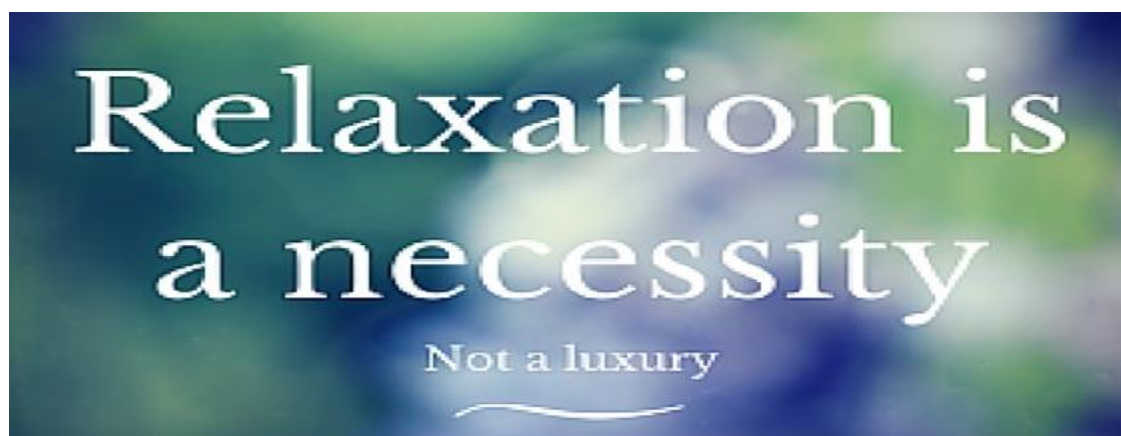
- Thinking that you may lose control and/or go “mad”
- Thinking that you might die
- Thinking that you may have a heart attack/be sick/faint/have a brain tumour
- Feeling that people are looking at you and observing your anxiety
- Feeling as though things are speeding up/slowing down
- Feeling detached from your environment and the people in it
- Feeling like wanting to run away/escape from the situation
- Feeling on edge and alert to everything around you

If you are unfortunate to experience any of the symptoms of anxiety then Relaxation may help you.



What is relaxation?

Relaxation is allowing physical and/or mental tension to be released. Tension is the body's natural response to threat, part of the body's alarm or survival mechanism. It can be a very useful response, but a lot of the time, we don't need this tension, so it's okay to learn to let it go, and learn some relaxation skills.



How relaxation can help:

Relaxation helps to reduce tiredness and pain which is often a result of being constantly stressed or anxious. It helps to improve sleep by letting us be calm and peaceful. Relaxation can also help us to cope better with everyday life because we are less stressed.

Learning to relax can take time and requires a lot of practice. There are many different techniques such as yoga, meditation, massage, aromatherapy, music or breathing techniques. The relaxation technique you choose will depend on the environment or the situation you are in.

Using breathing techniques is a way of 'taking control' of those runaway thoughts and emotions we so often experience if we are stressed or anxious.



Here is an example of a simple breathing exercise which can be done in a few seconds, no matter where you are. It is particularly helpful at stressful times, but it's also useful to do it at regular intervals throughout the day.

Take a deep, slow breath into your tummy and hold it for 5 seconds. Feel your abdomen expand as you do this.

Breathe out slowly, to a count of 5. Breathe in again, make every breath slow and steady and exactly the same as the one before it and the one after it. As you breathe out, concentrate on expelling ALL the air in your lungs. If you're alone, you could make a noise like "who" as you do this to help you feel the air being let out. Keep the outbreath going for as long as you can. Keep it relaxed for a few seconds before you inhale again.

So the next time you feel your anxiety taking over, try the breathing exercise above and see if it helps you to take back a little control of those runaway thoughts and emotions.