

NO LiMiTS

Helping Young People
Help Themselves

ANXIETY AND PANIC ATTACKS

Information and tips to help if you are
anxious or if you have a panic attack



What is anxiety?



Anxiety is a strong feeling of worry that can be about something happening in the future or something we think might happen, certain situations, or a mix of things.

Sometimes it can be hard to pin down exactly what is making you anxious. For example, if someone says they are anxious about flying, it might not necessarily be the act of flying that makes them anxious. It could be the waiting around not knowing where or when the flight will be called, being in a busy terminal, being in an unfamiliar place, or being in an enclosed space.

If you're not sure exactly what is making you feel anxious, it can be harder to control. Going through the different situations in the thing that makes you anxious (like all the different aspects of flying) with someone or by yourself can be a useful for helping you begin to control your worry.

What does anxiety feel like?

There are lots of different things that people may feel when they are anxious and they will be different for everyone. These feelings may differ depending on what the situation is, or they may always be the same.

Common signs and feelings of anxiety include:

- Panic
- A raised heart rate
- Feeling hot
- Feeling sick, faint or shaky
- Feeling down and low on energy
- Being unsettled or irritable
- Trouble sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating

What can cause anxiety?

Social situations

This will be different things for different people. Some people may find they get anxious about being out and around other people, while others may find they get anxious about more direct social situations, like a party or gathering, or spending long amounts of time with people they don't know too well.



Stress

Stress in your life can make you feel anxious, especially if you feel like it's building up inside you. This may be because of things like pressure at work, school or college, or your money or housing situation.



Past experiences and trauma

If you went through something in the past such as abuse or violence, the loss of someone close to you or another big life change, there may be triggers in your life now, related to these things, which can cause anxiety.



Current events

People may worry about things going on in the world and what the future will look like. These can be things like national or global economic situations, the environment, conflict and wars.



Phobias

A phobia is a fear of something in particular, like an object or thing, feeling, a place or a situation. Common phobias include fear of spiders, heights and small spaces.



Other mental health issues

Anxiety is often a symptom of other mental health issues, including depression, feeling low, eating disorders and body image issues. Being in a situation that affects something you struggle with, like eating out or wearing clothes you're not comfortable in, may make you anxious. Getting support for these things may help to control your anxiety.



What can I do if I feel anxious?

Talk to someone you trust

Talking to someone about the things that make you anxious can help you to feel more in control of the situation. Together, you might be able to come up with some coping strategies or discuss what might help you get through the moments that make you anxious.



If you aren't sure what is worrying you, talking with someone might help you to work out what's causing it and take steps to control your feelings.



Try some quick coping solutions

Lots of people find things like a fidget toy, stress ball or something soft to hold help them control their anxiety if they are in situations that trigger it for them.

You could also try using something with a gentle, calming smell, like a lavender balm or honey-scented hand cream. This might help you to breathe slower and reduce your heart rate.

Try some breathing techniques

When we get anxious, our breathing can speed up and become shallower, making us feel worse. Slowing your breathing down helps to reduce your heart rate and can help you to restore some control to the situation.



We've got a couple of breathing exercises you can do on the back page of this booklet that might help you to control your breathing.



Remind yourself that these feelings will pass

Anxiety is a feeling and that's all it is. No matter how anxious you feel, it will pass and you will forget that you're feeling anxious or you will move on from the situation and feel better.

Each time, remember that you got through it the last time and you were okay in the end, so you can do it again.

Write down your thoughts

Writing down your thoughts can help you to process and understand them. Try writing how you feel before you do something that makes you feel anxious, what you're going to do to help yourself and how you feel after you've got through it.



Take extra time to look after yourself

If you're going to do something that makes you anxious, or you are feeling anxious generally, make extra effort to be kind to yourself. Give yourself more time to do things that will relax you and make you happy.

If you're worried about something coming up, try getting a bit of extra sleep the night before, or go for a little walk and give yourself time to prepare so you have everything you need and aren't rushing around.

Panic attacks

Panic attacks happen to people for lots of different reasons. Some people may get them when they are in stressful situations, such as before a job interview, while others might experience them when they are in places or situations that make them uncomfortable, for example being in a social situation or in an enclosed space.

Panic attacks usually last between five and 20 minutes and symptoms may include:

- A racing heartbeat
- Sweating
- Hot flushes
- Feeling sick, faint or shaky
- Feeling like you're struggling to breathe
- Pain in your chest
- Feeling like you're not connected to your body

Although panic attacks can be scary, it's important to know that they won't cause you any physical harm and you are unlikely to need to go to hospital because of one.

If you experience panic attacks and sometimes struggle with them, you may wish to speak to a professional about it, such as a No Limits worker. We have a range of support that could help you, like our out-of-hours Safe Havens for young people requiring urgent mental health support, or our youth wellbeing practitioners who can give you more coping strategies to try if you feel you are going to have a panic attack. More details of our support are later in this booklet.

What can I do if I have a panic attack?

Tell someone

You don't have to tell anyone, but if there is someone with or near you that you think could help you, you could tell them that you are having a panic attack and it might help you to feel more in control of the situation.



Focus on breathing

When you have a panic attack, your breathing becomes lighter and quicker, which raises your heart rate. To help slow it down, try some of the breathing exercises on the back of this booklet.

Grounding techniques

Doing a grounding technique can help you stay in the moment and refocus your mind. Try naming five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.



Think about what is happening

Try and get the rational part of your brain working again. Acknowledging that you're having a panic attack can help gear your mind up to deal with it. Also remind yourself that the feeling will pass and that it won't do any physical harm to you.

Afterwards

Remember to be kind to yourself afterwards. Try and give yourself some time to recover - have a rest and something to eat if you feel like it, and have some water, too.



You might also want to tell someone what happened if it would help get out how you're feeling or help you if you have another panic attack.

How can I help someone who has anxiety?

Help them through their anxious moments

Give them confidence that they can get through and help them plan how they're going to help themselves manage their feelings. You could also do some slow breathing with them to help them relax.



Reassure them that their feelings are valid

They may feel embarrassed or ashamed, or feel like they're getting worked up about something small, but everyone has valid reasons for the way they feel. Telling them that it's okay to feel like this and that they're not alone can really help.

Respect their boundaries

While it is good to do things out of your comfort zone and stretch yourself to overcome fears and worries, don't try and get them to do more than they feel comfortable with, as this might make things worse. Encourage them gently and praise them when they do something challenging.



Check in on them

Regular contact means that they have someone to share how they're feeling with and asking them how they are tells them that you're there for them. You might also want to ask if there's anything you can do to help them control their anxiety.

Support them to get further help

If you're worried about them, try and support them to reach out for further help from a professional, like their GP or a No Limits worker. Getting support from somewhere can be daunting, even if it's the right thing to do, so helping them with practical things like making contact or booking appointments can be a big help.



How can I help someone having a panic attack?

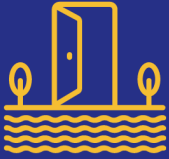
Stay with them and stay calm

Staying with the person that's having the panic attack might help to calm them down. If you stay with them, staying calm is important as panicking might make them worse. Reassure them that they will be okay and it will be over soon.



Ask if they need anything

They might want a glass of water or a sweet snack, want to go outside for some fresh air or go to a quiet space. They might find it hard to communicate, but letting them know you're there if they do need anything can help.



Help them to breathe

Help them to focus on their breathing, counting the seconds out with them or going round the fingers with them in the exercises on the back.



Talk with them

Talking with them could help distract them from the situation. You could talk about anything, but try and keep it positive.



If they are finding it overwhelming trying to have a conversation, just help them focus on their breathing instead.

Support them afterwards

After the panic attack has finished, they might be feeling drained and overwhelmed as well as still feeling anxious. Let them know you're there to help them get through it.



If you can, check in on them later on to see how they are doing and if they want to talk about it or get any further support.

Want to talk to No Limits?

We offer free, confidential information, advice and support for young people under 26 in Southampton, Hampshire, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

Advice Centre

Open six days a week, come down and talk to a trained youth worker about any issue you have, without needing to make an appointment.

Address

13 High Street
Southampton, SO14 2DF

Opening times

Mon 10am-5pm | Tue 10am-5pm
Wed 1:30pm-8pm | Thu 10am-8pm
Fri 10am-5pm | Sat 10am-1:30pm



Advice Centre

nolimitshelp.org.uk/advice-and-wellbeing-hub/advice-centre

Mental health support

We offer a broad range of mental health and wellbeing support, covering our whole area.

Support includes:

- Counselling
- One-to-one or group work with a youth wellbeing practitioner
- Three out-of-hours Safe Havens across our area
- Mental health transition support for 16-25 year olds
- Social prescribing



Mental Health Support

nolimitshelp.org.uk/mental-health-and-wellbeing

Find out more

nolimitshelp.org.uk | 02380 224 224 | enquiries@nolimitshelp.org.uk

Other organisations

If you want to talk to No Limits, our information is on the previous page, but you can also contact these organisations for support.

All support is available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Papyrus

Phone service for people under 35 experiencing suicidal thoughts. Call the Hopeline on 0800 068 4141.

Samaritans

Phone line on **116 123**. This is a listening service and they won't offer you advice or information.

Shout

Anonymous text service for people experiencing a mental health crisis. Text 'HANTS' to 85258.

I want to find out more



CALM

thecalmzone.net/guides/anxiety



NHS

nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/anxiety



Mind

mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/about-anxiety



YoungMinds

youngminds.org.uk/young-person/mental-health-conditions/anxiety

Breathing techniques

Five finger breathing

Slowly trace round each of the fingers on one hand with a finger from the other. Breathe in on the way up the finger and breathe out on the way down.



Square breathing

Start by breathing in and follow round until you start to feel relaxed.

