



## Understanding and Managing Anxiety

### What is Anxiety and why do I feel this way?

Our bodies are very clever, and they have an in-built system that watches out for danger, called our fear response. When we see or hear imminent danger nearby, our body gets ready to protect us. Our brain sends messages around the body to make sure we are ready to either 'fight, flight or freeze'. Our body then has extra energy so we can fight, run away or 'play dead' to avoid the danger.

This fear response is a helpful system as it keeps us safe, e.g, when crossing the road or if facing an immediate physical threat. Once the danger has passed, our body calms back down.

The fear response can also be set off by **thinking or believing** that danger is about to happen. For example, we might worry about how we are going to perform at an interview and worry that we will do badly. This is known as a **perceived threat, as there is no evidence it will actually happen**. If we perceive a lot of things as potential threats, then we keep our fear response unusually high. Sometimes we perceive threats as they are related to our own previous experience in life.

So, even if there is no actual threat, our worries can convince our bodies otherwise. This can leave us feeling anxious and on high alert a lot of the time. This worry about the future is called anxiety. If you are constantly worried, your body will respond to this and you may feel anxious a lot of the time. High or sustained levels of anxiety make it hard for our bodies to feel calm, as our danger alert system is being set off too frequently, like a faulty smoke detector.

Feeling anxious can have a big impact on our daily lives and affect the way we feel, think and behave. For example, it may reduce our self-confidence and lead us to avoid certain situations.

### What changes might I notice?

The symptoms of anxiety may not always be obvious and may develop slowly over time. Given that we all experience some anxiety at various points in our lives, it can be hard to know how much anxiety is too much.

Anxiety can not only affect how we feel. It also affects us physically. Some common symptoms of anxiety include: .

- A sensation of a racing heart / palpitations;
- A feeling of butterflies / nerves;
- Nausea and stomach aches;
- Tightening of the chest;
- Breathlessness;
- Trouble sleeping;

- Feeling jumpy, restless or shaky, on edge;
- Feeling of impending doom and worry;
- Worries that keep snowballing, e.g. what if that happens? And what then?
- Finding it hard to distract from the worries.

Typically, anxiety is usually limited in duration and is likely to be connected to a situation or an event, e.g., an exam or a job interview. However, when it becomes more frequent and persistent, and not connected to a specific situation or event, it can begin to affect everyday life and is more likely to be a cause for concern.

Anxiety can be experienced in many ways. This can be in the form of uncontrollable worry, intense fear, phobias, panic, distressing dreams or flashbacks of traumatic events.

If you feel your anxiety is disrupting your daily life, feels hard to control or is out of proportion to situations, please make an appointment to discuss this with your GP, or explore the services at the end of this leaflet.

### **How can Lymphoedema or Lipalgia syndrome (Lipoedema) impact Anxiety?**

Having to cope with a long-term health condition, like Lymphoedema or Lipalgia syndrome, can result in you needing to make changes to how you live your life, e.g., having to wear compression garments, change your work or social life. This can lead to concerns about how you may cope with this in the future. It can also lead to additional worries about your future health. Some people say that it makes them more worried about social interactions, as they fear stigma or judgement.

### **What might people feel anxious about?**

We can feel anxious about a whole range of things, personal to our own thoughts and experiences. There are some areas which are more commonly seen in Lymphoedema services. Three common anxiety patterns are detailed below, but please remember, each of us is unique, and you may experience any of these symptoms below in any combination.

#### **Health anxiety**

Health anxiety describes excessive worry about your future health. It may develop from concerns about an existing condition worsening, interpretation of body sensations as signs of a serious illness, or concern about developing a new illness.

For example, worrying a headache might be a sign of a potential brain tumour can lead to increasing 'what if' worries and anxiety. Anxiety itself can then cause symptoms like headaches or a racing heartbeat, which could be further interpreted as evidence of illness.

Some common symptoms of health anxiety include:

- Constantly worrying about your health;
- Excessive focus on bodily sensations and body changes such as lumps;

- Seeking frequent reassurance from healthcare professionals or family members that you are not ill;
- Worrying that a doctor or medical tests may have missed something;
- Frequently looking up health information on the internet or in the media.

Chronic health conditions like Lymphedema or Lipalgia Syndrome may cause pain and swelling in various body parts. Coping with an existing condition may contribute to a heightened awareness of bodily sensations, which can lead to health anxiety.

## **Social Anxiety**

Social anxiety may arise when we avoid social situations due to an overwhelming fear of being judged or hurt by others. Social anxiety can be triggered by experiences of stigma, bullying, rejection, family conflict, low self-esteem and confidence, or trauma, and can affect your social confidence and experiences. It can lead you to withdraw from friends and family, lower your self-confidence and place strain upon your relationships.

Some common symptoms of social anxiety include :

- Intense fear of interacting with strangers;
- Worry about or avoidance of social activities, such as meeting friends or family, starting conversations, speaking on the phone, working or shopping;
- Finding it difficult to do things when others are watching;
- Talking negatively to yourself during and after social interactions, focusing on what you think you did wrong;
- Feeling self-consciousness and avoiding eye contact, especially with strangers;
- Fear of how you appear to others in social interactions;
- Generally anticipating negative outcomes for oneself in social situations, such as being judged or hurt.

Having an existing condition that can impact upon your body shape and appearance can contribute to concerns about judgement and stigma from others who do not fully understand the condition. It can also reduce your ability to participate in social situations as fully as you would wish to, due to physical restrictions. Many people report that it makes them feel more self-conscious, particularly when they are unable to find clothes and shoes that match their identity.

## **Panic attacks**

A panic attack is a sudden episode of intense fear that triggers severe physical reactions in our body. It's when our fear response is significantly triggered. Panic attacks can be very frightening. When panic attacks occur, people might think they're losing control, having a heart attack, or even dying. Any situation can cause a panic attack if it creates enough fear or anxiety to trigger the bodily reaction. Although panic attacks themselves aren't life-threatening, they can be frightening and significantly affect an individual's quality of life.

During a panic attack, you may experience a range of different physical symptoms, including:

- Feeling short of breath and/ or breathing very fast (hyperventilation);





- Feeling your heart thudding or beating fast;
- Feeling sick or as if you have 'butterflies' in your stomach;
- Feeling faint or dizzy;
- Feeling very hot or very cold;
- Sweating, trembling or shaking;
- Nausea (feeling sick);
- Pain in your chest or abdomen;
- Feeling like your legs are shaky or are turning to jelly;
- Feeling disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings.

## Useful resources




Below are some useful resources available to you as a first step in noticing and understanding your anxiety and taking action to reduce it. We hope some of these are useful.

**If you are feeling high or sustained levels of anxiety, please book an appointment with your GP to access therapeutic support in your area.** Each health board also has their own wellbeing website which shares useful information and details about local services. The details are available on our Lymphoedema Wales Emotional Wellbeing leaflet on our website.



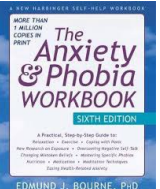
## Information websites


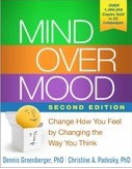
 <b>NHS – Anxiety</b> Contains information on types of anxiety, how to cope, and wellbeing tips.	<a href="https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/anxiety/">https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/anxiety/</a>
 <b>Mind</b> Contains information about anxiety, how you can access support, and includes tips on how to take care of yourself.	<a href="https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks">https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks</a>
 <b>Anxiety UK</b> Contains information about anxiety, podcasts and webinars, and self-care tips.	<a href="https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk">https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk</a>
 <b>No Panic</b> Contains information about anxiety and relaxation techniques, alongside offering support by email and running a 'No Panic Helpline,'	The No Panic Helpline : 0300 772 9844 (10am – 10pm every day)  Email support : <a href="mailto:info@nopanic.org.uk">info@nopanic.org.uk</a> (responses within two working days)  <a href="https://nopanic.org.uk/">https://nopanic.org.uk/</a>

## Helplines if you wish to talk to someone


 <p><b>Samaritans</b></p> <p>If you do not want to talk to someone over the phone, these text lines are open 24 hours a day, every day.</p> <p>Samaritans works to make sure there's always someone there for anyone who needs someone.</p>	<p>Helpline : 116 123 (24 hours, every day)</p> <p>Welsh Language Line : 0808 164 0123 (7pm – 11pm every day)</p> <p>Email : <a href="mailto:jo@samaritans.org">jo@samaritans.org</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.samaritans.org/?nation=wales">https://www.samaritans.org/?nation=wales</a></p>
 <p><b>Mind Cymru Infoline</b></p> <p>Mind Cymru's Infoline offers information about anxiety, where to seek support, and advocacy services.</p>	<p>0300 123 3393 (9am – 6pm, Monday – Friday)</p> <p>Email : <a href="mailto:info@mind.org.uk">info@mind.org.uk</a></p>
 <p><b>C.A.L.L. Helpline – Wales</b></p> <p>CALL offers emotional support and information/literature on mental health and related matters to the people of Wales.</p>	<p>0800 132737 (24 hours, every day)</p> <p>OR Text the word HELP to 81066</p>

## Useful books and workbooks



 <p><b>The Reading Agency</b></p> <p>The Reading Agency scheme helps you borrow books on anxiety and other emotional topics for free.</p>	<p><a href="https://reading-well.org.uk/wales">https://reading-well.org.uk/wales</a></p>
 <p><b>Managing Your Worries</b></p> <p>A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy based approach by University of Exeter</p>	<p><a href="https://tinyurl.com/ux877dyr">https://tinyurl.com/ux877dyr</a></p>
 <p><b>The Anxiety &amp; Phobia Workbook (Sixth Edition)</b></p> <p>Author – Edmund J. Bourne</p>	<p>Available from a range of book sellers</p>

 <p><b>Government of Western Australia</b></p> <p>The Centre for Clinical Interventions website offers self-help resources for a range of anxiety-related topics.</p>	<p>Health Anxiety Workbook:  <a href="https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety">https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety</a></p> <p>Social Anxiety Workbook:  <a href="https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Social-Anxiety">https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Social-Anxiety</a></p>
 <p><b>Mind Over Mood</b></p> <p>A self-help workbook to improve your life and change how you feel. Similar workbooks are available in bookshops or online websites.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.mindovermood.com/">https://www.mindovermood.com/</a></p>

### Self-guided therapy

 <p><b>SilverCloud</b></p> <p>SilverCloud is an online therapy platform that provides a range of self-help courses including CBT.</p>	<p><a href="https://nhs.wales.silvercloudhealth.com/signup">https://nhs.wales.silvercloudhealth.com/signup</a></p> <p>If you sign up and reside in Wales, you can access a free online self-help course on anxiety, and other topics if required.</p>
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### Apps (the following are currently free, please note they may add charges in future)

 <p><b>MindShift CBT</b></p> <p>MindShift CBT uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques to support in managing anxiety</p>	<p><a href="https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/">https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/</a></p>
 <p><b>Daylio</b></p> <p>Daylio allows you to keep a daily journal on your mobile phone, which is turned into charts and diagrams.</p>	<p><a href="https://daylio.net/">https://daylio.net/</a></p>