



Royal Flying Doctor Service  
QUEENSLAND SECTION

# anxiety

A guide to anxiety from the RFDS

RFDS OUTBACK MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE • AUGUST 2019



## WHY DOES ANXIETY OCCUR?

Anxiety is the body's way of responding to danger. When the brain perceives a threat, it activates the body's fight or flight alarm system releasing adrenaline into the blood. Uncomfortable feelings are then experienced because the adrenaline causes the body's system to speed up by diverting blood to larger muscle groups preparing to attack (anger) or escape (anxiety).

This happens whether the danger is real or not - it's the body's alarm and survival mechanism. This system works so well that it often kicks in even when it's not needed.

People who get anxious tend to adopt a scanning mode of constantly being on the lookout for dangers and are hyper alert to any signals making it more likely for the alarm system to be activated.

**Whilst avoiding people or situations may assist in feeling better at the time, it doesn't make anxiety better over a longer period.**

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms can impact thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the following ways:

### Thoughts

Thoughts that occur usually relate to overestimating or exaggerating the actual threat and minimising our ability to cope. This can include thinking *"I'm in danger right now,"* *"the worst possible scenario is going to happen,"* or *"I won't be able to cope."*

### Behaviours

Behaviours usually relate to avoiding or escaping situations to enhance a sense of safety. This often includes not going out, only going out with someone else, escaping or leaving early or only going to certain places at certain times e.g. shopping at smaller places at less busy times.

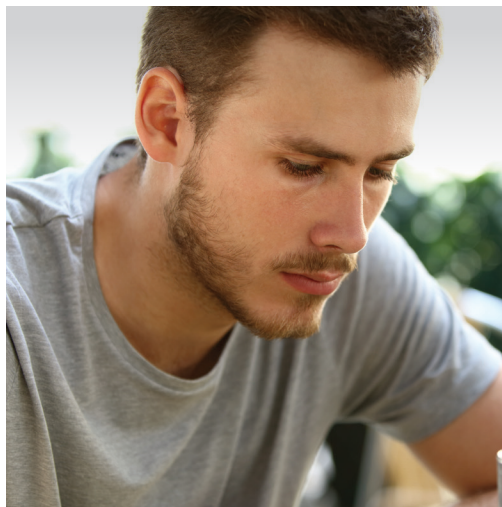
Whilst avoiding people or situations may assist in feeling better at the time, it doesn't make anxiety better over a longer period. Safety behaviours can maintain anxiety because these behaviours limit ability to find out that, without them, anxiety will reduce and go away on its own.

### Feelings

Anxiety is usually acknowledged through physical feelings which include feeling tense, light headed or shaky, heart racing and breathing fast.

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[ Learning to confront anxiety may be uncomfortable in the short term but it can help with taking control and feeling better in the long term. ]



## TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING ANXIETY

### Identify Triggers

What or when are the times you are likely to get anxious? If you can identify the patterns, then it may be possible to do something about these situations which may enable you to respond differently.

### Do Things Differently

Learning to confront anxiety may be uncomfortable in the short term but it can help with taking control and feeling better in the long term.

Planning to gradually do the things you avoid can assist in learning that you can still enjoy these events and that the anxious feelings will go away.

Gradually building up to doing something you have been avoiding can also be an appropriate way of managing uncomfortable feelings.

If you normally depend on safety behaviours to cope, then listing these in order of importance and slowly dropping or not doing the least important will assist in gradually working your way up over time.

## STOPP

The following technique can be useful in managing anxiety:

- S Stop!** Pause, don't react automatically.
- T Take a breath.** Notice your breath as you breathe in and out.
- O Observe.** What are you thinking and feeling? Is this fact or opinion?
- P Pull back.** Put in some perspective. See the situation as an outside observer. What would someone else see and make of it? Is there another way of looking at the situation? What advice would I give to someone else?
- P Practice what works.** Do what is most helpful. Focus on your principles and values and consider whether your actions will be effective, appropriate and proportionate to the event.

For further advice specific to your situation, or to find out more about Outback Mental Health services in your area, email [outback@rfdsqlld.com.au](mailto:outback@rfdsqlld.com.au) or call **1300 010 174**.



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