



Anxiety and panic attacks

This resource explains anxiety and panic attacks, including possible causes and how you can access treatment and support. Includes tips for helping yourself, and guidance for friends and family.

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email: publications@mind.org.uk

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What is anxiety?

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

“For me, anxiety feels as if everyone in the world is waiting for me to trip up, so that they can laugh at me. It makes me feel nervous and unsure whether the next step I take is the best way forward.”

Most people feel anxious at times. It's particularly common to experience some anxiety while coping with stressful events or changes, especially if they could have a big impact on your life. (See our pages on [managing stress](#) for more information about stress.)

What is the 'fight, flight or freeze' response?

Like all animals, human beings have evolved ways to help us protect ourselves from danger. When we feel under threat our bodies react by releasing certain hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones:

- make us feel more alert, so we can act faster
- make our hearts beat faster, quickly sending blood to where it's needed most.

After we feel the threat has passed, our bodies release other hormones to help our muscles relax. This can sometimes cause us to shake.

This is commonly called the 'fight, flight or freeze' response – it's something that happens automatically in our bodies, and we have no control over it.

“Going out of the house is a challenge because I [have a] fear of panicking and feel that I'm being watched or judged. It's just horrible. I want to get help but I'm afraid of being judged.”

When is anxiety a mental health problem?

Anxiety can become a mental health problem if it impacts on your ability to live your life as fully as you want to. For example, it may be a problem for you if:

- your feelings of anxiety are very strong or last for a long time
- your fears or worries are out of proportion to the situation
- you avoid situations that might cause you to feel anxious
- your worries feel very distressing or are hard to control
- you regularly experience [symptoms of anxiety](#), which could include [panic attacks](#)
- you find it hard to go about your everyday life or do things you enjoy.

If your symptoms fit a particular set of medical criteria then you might be diagnosed with a particular [anxiety disorder](#). But it's also possible to experience problems with anxiety without having a specific diagnosis. Our pages on [self-care](#) and [treatment](#) for anxiety problems offer suggestions for help and support.

“You know that feeling when you’re rocking on the back legs of your chair and suddenly for just a split second you think you’re about to fall; that feeling in your chest? Imagine that split second feeling being frozen in time and lodged in your chest for minutes/hours/days, and imagine with it that sense of impending doom and dread sticking around too, but sometimes you don’t even know why.”

What are anxiety disorders?

Anxiety can be experienced in lots of different ways. If your experiences meet certain criteria your doctor might diagnose you with a specific anxiety disorder.

Some commonly diagnosed anxiety disorders are:

- **Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)** – this means having regular or uncontrollable worries about many different things in your everyday life. Because there are lots of possible [symptoms of anxiety](#) this can be quite a broad diagnosis, meaning that the problems you experience with GAD might be quite different from another person's experiences.
- **Social anxiety disorder** – this diagnosis means you experience extreme fear or anxiety triggered by social situations (such as parties, workplaces, or any situation in which you have to talk to another person). It is also known as social phobia. (See our page on [types of phobia](#) for more information.)
- **Panic disorder** – this means having regular or frequent panic attacks without a clear cause or trigger. Experiencing panic disorder can mean that you feel constantly afraid of having another panic attack, to the point that this fear itself can trigger your panic attacks. (See our page on [panic attacks](#) for more information.)
- **Phobias** – a phobia is an extreme fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation (such as social situations) or a particular object (such as spiders). (See our pages on [phobias](#) for more information.)
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** – this is a diagnosis you may be given if you develop anxiety problems after going through something you found traumatic. PTSD can cause flashbacks or nightmares which can feel like you’re re-living all the fear and anxiety you experienced during the actual event. (See our pages on [PTSD](#) for more information.)
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** – you may be given this diagnosis if your anxiety problems involve having repetitive thoughts, behaviours or urges. (See our pages on [OCD](#) for more information.)

- **Health anxiety** – this means you experience obsessions and compulsions relating to illness, including researching symptoms or checking to see if you have them. It is related to OCD. (You can find out more about health anxiety on the [Anxiety UK website](#).)
- **Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)** – this means you experience obsessions and compulsions relating to your physical appearance. (See our pages on [BDD](#) for more information.)
- **Perinatal anxiety or perinatal OCD** – some women develop anxiety problems during pregnancy or in the first year after giving birth. (See our pages on [perinatal anxiety](#) and [perinatal OCD](#) for more information.)

You might not have, or want, a diagnosis of a particular anxiety disorder – but it might still be useful to learn more about these different diagnoses to help you think about your own experiences of anxiety, and consider options for support.

[Read Zoe's blog about her experience of being diagnosed with generalised anxiety disorder \(GAD\) after her Dad passed away.](#)

"[It's like] like a swarm of bees just buzzing buzzing buzzing, not stopping, making it impossible to focus and seemingly impossible to slow down and take a breath."

Anxiety and other mental health problems

It's very common to experience anxiety alongside [other mental health problems](#), such as depression or suicidal feelings. If you have symptoms of both anxiety and depression but don't fit one more clearly than the other, you might be given a diagnosis of **mixed anxiety and depressive disorder**.

(See our pages on [depression](#) and [coping with suicidal feelings](#) for more information on these topics.)

[Read Pete's blog about living with anxiety and bipolar disorder.](#)

"I have generalised anxiety disorder and depression which seem to come in cycles. It is the unexpected attacks that I find the hardest."

What does anxiety feel like?

Anxiety feels different for everyone. You might experience some of the things listed below, and you might also have other experiences or difficulties that aren't listed here.

Effects on your body

- a churning feeling in your stomach
- feeling light-headed or dizzy

- pins and needles
- feeling restless or unable to sit still
- headaches, backache or other aches and pains
- faster breathing
- a fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat
- sweating or hot flushes
- [problems sleeping](#)
- grinding your teeth, especially at night
- nausea (feeling sick)
- needing the toilet more or less often
- changes in your sex drive
- having [panic attacks](#).

Effects on your mind

- feeling tense, nervous or unable to relax
- having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst
- feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down
- feeling like other people can see you're anxious and are looking at you
- feeling like you can't stop worrying, or that bad things will happen if you stop worrying
- worrying about anxiety itself, for example worrying about when panic attacks might happen
- wanting lots of reassurance from other people or worrying that people are angry or upset with you
- worrying that you're losing touch with reality
- rumination – thinking a lot about bad experiences, or thinking over a situation again and again
- depersonalisation – feeling disconnected from your mind or body, or like you're watching someone else (this is a type of [dissociation](#))
- derealisation – feeling disconnected from the world around you, or like the world isn't real (this is a type of [dissociation](#))
- worrying a lot about things that might happen in the future – you can read more about these sorts of worries [on the Anxiety UK website](#).

(See our pages on [sleep problems](#), [panic attacks](#) and [dissociative disorders](#) for more information about these topics, and tips on how to cope.)

"I could feel all these physical symptoms building inside me, literally filling every part of my body until I felt completely light-headed and disembodied."

Anxiety and physical health problems

Some studies suggest that experiencing anxiety could increase the risk of developing certain long-term physical health problems, including diabetes, stomach ulcers and heart problems. But there's not enough evidence to say for sure exactly what the risks are, or what groups of people are most likely to be affected. Having a physical illness or disability can also make you feel stressed and anxious, so it might sometimes feel like your anxiety problems and physical health problems are part of a vicious circle.

Sometimes it might be difficult to work out whether your symptoms are totally related to anxiety, or might be related to a different illness. If you're experiencing any physical symptoms it's best to talk to your GP, so they can check out what may be causing them.

"I constantly thought I was dying of undiagnosed illnesses, because I was convinced that the physical symptoms were too bad to be 'just anxiety'."

How else might anxiety affect my life?

Anxiety symptoms can last for a long time, or come and go. You might find you have difficulty with day-to-day aspects of your life, including:

- looking after yourself
- holding down a job
- forming or maintaining relationships
- trying new things
- simply enjoying your leisure time.

[Read's Max's blog about the impact of social anxiety when he started University, and how he confronted it.](#)

In some cases anxiety can have a serious impact on your ability to work. (See our pages on [how to be mentally healthy at work](#) for information on how to cope. Our legal pages on [discrimination at work](#) can provide information about your rights in the workplace.)

If you drive you may have to tell the DVLA that you have anxiety. (For information on your right to drive, including when and how to contact the DVLA, see our legal pages on [fitness to drive](#).)

What is a panic attack?

Panic attacks are a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of your body's normal response to danger, stress or excitement. This section has information about the following:

- What do panic attacks feel like?
- When might I have panic attacks?
- What helps to manage panic attacks?
- What is panic disorder?

"I can't sleep due to panic attacks and nightmares. When I fall asleep within an hour I am up, soaked, heart racing and shaking."

What do panic attacks feel like?

During a panic attack, physical symptoms can build up very quickly. These can include:

- a pounding or racing heartbeat
- feeling faint, dizzy or light-headed
- feeling very hot or very cold
- sweating, trembling or shaking
- nausea (feeling sick)
- pain in your chest or abdomen
- struggling to breathe or feeling like you're choking
- feeling like your legs are shaky or are turning to jelly
- feeling disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings (these are types of dissociation – see our pages on [dissociative disorders](#) for more information).

During a panic attack you might feel very afraid that you're:

- losing control
- going to faint
- having a heart attack
- going to die.

“My teeth would chatter uncontrollably and my whole body [would] tremble, I'd hyperventilate and cry with panic as the feeling that I was going to fall unconscious was so convincing.”

You might find that you become scared of going out alone or to public places because you're worried about having another panic attack. If this fear becomes very intense, it may be called agoraphobia (see our pages on [phobias](#) for more information).

“I felt like I couldn't breathe, I just wanted to get out, to go somewhere else, but I couldn't because I was on a train.”

When might I have panic attacks?

Panic attacks can happen during the day or night. Some people have one panic attack then don't ever experience another, or you might find that you have them regularly, or several in a short space of time. You might notice that particular places, situations or activities seem to trigger panic attacks. For example, they might happen before a stressful appointment.

Most panic attacks last between 5–20 minutes. They can come on very quickly. Your symptoms will usually peak (be at their worst) within 10 minutes. You might also experience symptoms of a panic attack over a longer period of time. This could be because you're having a second panic attack, or you're experiencing other [symptoms of anxiety](#).

“My panic attacks seem to come out of the blue now. But in fact, they seem to be triggered mainly at night when I want to go to sleep but cannot stop my mind racing, experiencing worry and panic about anything that may be on my mind.”

What helps to manage panic attacks?

Panic attacks can be frightening, but there are things you can do to help yourself cope. It could help to keep print these tips out and keep them somewhere easy to find.

During a panic attack:

- **Focus on your breathing.** It can help to concentrate on breathing slowly in and out while counting to five.
- **Stamp on the spot.** Some people find this helps control their breathing.
- **Focus on your senses.** For example, taste mint-flavoured sweets or gum, or touch or cuddle something soft.
- **Try grounding techniques.** Grounding techniques can help you feel more in control. They're especially useful if you experience dissociation during panic attacks. (See our page on [self-care for dissociative disorders](#) for more information on grounding techniques.)

After a panic attack:

- **Think about self-care.** It's important to pay attention to what your body needs after you've had a panic attack. For example, you might need to rest somewhere quietly, or eat or drink something.
- **Tell someone you trust.** If you feel able to, it could help to let someone know you've had a panic attack. It could be particularly helpful to mention how they might notice if you're having another one, and how you'd like them to help you.

(See our pages on [self-care for anxiety](#) and [treatments for anxiety](#) for more information on what could help.)

[Read Hannah's blog about how she's coped with panic attacks and social anxiety.](#)

What is panic disorder?

If you're having lots of panic attacks at unpredictable times and there doesn't seem to be a particular trigger or cause, you might be given a diagnosis of panic disorder. It's common to experience panic disorder and agoraphobia (a [type of phobia](#)) together. People who experience panic disorder may have some periods with few or no panic attacks, but have lots at other times.

Panic disorder and high sensitivity

Some research suggests that people who have panic disorder might be very sensitive to sensory experiences (such as sunlight, smells and changes in the weather), but there's not enough evidence yet to say for sure. Also it's not clear whether having a high level of sensitivity to these sorts of things is something that might cause you to develop panic disorder, or whether it may be an effect of having it.

“Never knowing when I was going to [have] a panic attack was the worst feeling in the world.”

What causes anxiety?

No one knows exactly what causes anxiety problems, but there probably lots of factors involved. This section covers some things which make anxiety problems more likely to happen:

- past or childhood experiences
- your current life situation
- physical and mental health problems
- drugs and medication

Can anxiety problems be inherited genetically?

Research shows that having a close relative with anxiety problems increases your chances of experiencing anxiety problems yourself. But at the moment there is not enough evidence to show whether this is because we share some genetic factors that make us more vulnerable to developing anxiety, or because we learn particular ways of thinking and behaving from our parents and other family members as we grow up.

Past or childhood experiences

Difficult experiences in childhood, adolescence or adulthood are a common trigger for anxiety problems. Going through stress and trauma is likely to have a particularly big impact if it happens when you're very young. Experiences which can trigger anxiety problems include things like:

- physical or emotional abuse
- neglect
- losing a parent
- being bullied or being socially excluded.

Having parents who don't treat you warmly, are overprotective or are emotionally inconsistent can also be a factor.

“I was sent to boarding school and suffered acute separation anxiety, being away from home, and my brother nearly died when I was 12. My mum had an acute breakdown for a period of about a year and had to be home-nursed.”

Your current life situation

Current issues or problems in your life can also trigger anxiety. For example:

- exhaustion or a build up of stress
- long working hours

- being out of work
- feeling under pressure while studying or in work
- having money problems
- homelessness or housing problems
- losing someone close to you
- feeling lonely or isolated
- being bullied, harassed or abused.

(See our pages on [managing stress](#), [staying mentally well at work](#), [student wellbeing](#), [money](#), [housing](#), [bereavement](#), [loneliness](#) and [abuse](#) for more information and sources of support on these issues.)

"I have recently realised that I spend money when anxious, which in turn makes me feel anxious about how much I'm spending."

Physical or mental health problems

Other health problems can sometimes cause anxiety, or might make it worse. For example:

- **Physical health problems** – living with a serious, ongoing or life-threatening physical health condition can sometimes trigger anxiety.
- **Other mental health problems** – it's also common to develop anxiety while living with [other mental health problems](#), such as [depression](#).

Drugs and medication

Anxiety can sometimes be a side effect of taking:

- some psychiatric medications
- some medications for physical health problems
- recreational drugs or alcohol.

(See our pages on [psychiatric drugs](#) and [recreational drugs and alcohol](#) for more information. You can also report medication side effects on the government's [Yellow Card website](#).)

Could diet be a factor?

Some types of food or drink can trigger symptoms of anxiety or panic, or make them worse. These include sugar and caffeine. (See our pages on [food and mood](#) for more information about the relationship between what you eat and how you feel.)

"I have... cut out alcohol. Many think [drinking alcohol] helps with anxiety, but it actually makes it worse in the long run."

How can I help myself?

Living with anxiety can be very difficult, but there are steps you can take that might help. This section has some suggestions for you to consider:

- Talk to someone you trust
- Try to manage your worries
- Look after your physical health
- Try breathing exercises
- Keep a diary
- Try peer support
- Complementary and alternative therapies

(For tips on coping with panic attacks, see our section on [what helps to manage panic attacks](#).)

Talk to someone you trust

Talking to someone you trust about what's making you anxious could be a relief. It may be that just having someone listen to you and show they care can help in itself. If you aren't able to open up to someone close to you, the [Samaritans](#) and [Anxiety UK](#) both run helplines that you can call to talk to someone.

[Read Amy's blog about how sharing her experiences of anxiety with others online helps her.](#)

"Getting it off my chest seems to help relieve some of the pressure."

Try to manage your worries

It can be really hard to stop worrying when you have anxiety. You might have worries you can't control. Or you might feel like you need to keep worrying because it feels useful – or that bad things might happen if you stop.

It can be helpful to try different ways of addressing these worries. For example, you could:

- Set aside a specific time to focus on your worries – so you can reassure yourself you haven't forgotten to think about them. Some people find it helps to set a timer.
- Write down your worries and keep them in a particular place – for example, you could write them in a notebook, or on pieces of paper you put in an envelope or jar.

[Read Damien's blog about how being creative helps him manage his anxiety.](#)

"[I try to] accept that this is how I feel at the moment, but it won't last forever."

Look after your physical health

- **Try to get enough sleep.** Sleep can give you the energy to cope with difficult feelings and experiences. (See our page on [coping with sleep problems](#) for more information.)
- **Think about your diet.** Eating regularly and keeping your blood sugar stable can make a difference to your mood and energy levels. (See our page on [food and mood](#) for more information.)
- **Try to do some physical activity.** Exercise can be really helpful for your mental wellbeing. (See our pages on [physical activity](#) for more information.)

[Read Stephen's blog about how running helps him feel better.](#)

"I find going for a walk great, even if I can't go far. I walk around the garden and eat my lunch outside."

Try breathing exercises

Breathing exercises can help you cope and feel more in control. You can find some suggestions on our page on [relaxation](#) and [on the NHS Choices website](#).

"Breathe... always remember to breathe. Take time to inhale. It's the simplest thing, but is forgotten in panic attacks."

Can mindfulness help with anxiety?

Mindfulness is a way of giving your full attention to the present moment. It can help with some anxiety disorders, but the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) – the organisation that produces guidelines on best-practice in healthcare – says **it's not helpful for social anxiety**. (Read more about social anxiety in our page on [types of phobias](#)).

Some people say they find mindfulness helpful for coping with other [anxiety disorders](#), but others say it makes them feel worse – particularly if keeping a busy mind is an important way of coping for you. It's best to try it with a trained professional if possible, or to get advice from a doctor or therapist before trying it by yourself. (See our pages on [mindfulness](#) for more information.)

"Now I look for natural ways to control the panic and anxiety, including meditation, exercise, breathing exercises, mindfulness and diet."

Keep a diary

It might help to make a note of what happens when you get anxious or have a panic attack. This could help you spot patterns in what triggers these experiences for you, or notice early signs that they are beginning to happen.

You could also make a note of what's going well. Living with anxiety can mean you think a lot about things that worry you or are hard to do. It's important to be kind to yourself and notice the good things too.

"I keep a photo diary of all the things I've managed to do! Makes me think "I can do this". So when I go and sit in a café, or go for a walk, I take a pic to record that I've done it, and look back when I feel scared... it encourages me that maybe I can do something [again] if I've done it before."

Try peer support

Peer support brings together people who've had similar experiences to support each other. Many people find it helps them to share ideas about how to stay well, connect with others and feel less alone. You could:

- Contact a specialist organisation. For example, you can find details of support groups, forums and helplines on the [Anxiety Care](#), [Anxiety UK](#), [No More Panic](#), [No Panic](#) and [Triumph Over Phobia UK](#) websites.
- Join Elefriends, Mind's supportive online community (find out more on our page about [Elefriends](#)).
- Contact [Mind's Infoline](#) and ask about support groups near you. Alternatively you could [use our interactive map to find your local Mind](#), and contact them directly.

(See our pages on [peer support](#) for more information about what it involves and how to find a peer support group to suit you. If you're new to online peer support you might find it helpful to read our information on [how to stay safe online](#).)

Complementary and alternative therapies

Yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, herbal treatments, Bach flower remedies, and hypnotherapy are all types of complementary therapy that you could try, and see if they work for you. Some people find that one or more of these methods can help them to relax, or sleep better.

Many chemists and health shops stock different remedies and should be able to offer advice. (See our pages on [complementary and alternative therapies](#) for more information.)

"[For me, it's] a hypnotherapy CD. I laughed when my husband brought it home; now I use it myself – very calming."

What treatments are available?

There are various evidence-based treatments that have been found to help with anxiety problems and panic disorder. This section covers:

- self-help resources
- talking treatments

- medication
- how do I access treatment?
- what if I don't feel better?

Self-help resources

A self-help resource might be the first treatment option your doctor offers you. This is because it's available quite quickly, and there's a chance it could help you to feel better without needing to try other options.

Self-help could be delivered through:

- **Workbooks.** For example, your GP might recommend particular titles from a scheme called Reading Well Books on Prescription. This scheme is supported by most local libraries, so you can go and check the books out for free – you don't actually need a prescription from a doctor. (Find out more on the [Reading Well website](#)).
- **A computer-based CBT programme** for treating anxiety, panic and phobias, such as Fearfighter. Fearfighter costs money if you use it privately, but in some areas it's free to use on the NHS with a referral from your GP. (Read more about [Fearfighter on the NHS website](#).)

You might be offered a resource to work through your own, or on a course with other people who experience similar difficulties.

Talking treatments

If self-help resources aren't likely to help with the anxiety problems you're experiencing, or you've already tried them and they haven't helped, your doctor should offer you a talking treatment. There are two types of talking treatment recommended for anxiety and panic:

- **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)** – this focuses on how your thoughts, beliefs and attitudes affect your feelings and behaviour, and teaches you coping skills for dealing with different problems.
- **Applied relaxation therapy** – this involves learning how to relax your muscles in situations where you normally experience anxiety.

(See our pages on [talking treatments](#) and [CBT](#) for more information on these and other kinds of therapy.)

[Read Sarah's blog about how doing a course of CBT helped her manage her anxiety disorder.](#)

"I was diagnosed with generalised anxiety disorder, depression and OCD traits. I had cognitive behavioural therapy for almost a year, which was very helpful."

Medication

Your doctor might offer to prescribe you medication to help manage some symptoms. Some people find it helpful to try talking treatments and medication at the same time, but medication shouldn't be the only thing you're offered.

Medications you might be offered include:

- **Antidepressants.** Usually this will be a type called a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI), but these drugs can sometimes cause side effects such as sleeping problems or feeling more anxious than you did before. If SSRIs don't work or aren't suitable you may be offered a different kind called a tricyclic antidepressant. (See our pages on [antidepressants](#) for more information.)
- **Pregabalin.** In some cases, such as if you have a diagnosis of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), your doctor may decide to prescribe you a drug called pregabalin. This is an antiseizure drug which is normally used to treat epilepsy (a neurological disorder that can cause seizures), but is also licensed to treat anxiety. (See our pages on [anti-anxiety medication](#) and [pregabalin](#) for more information.)
- **Beta-blockers.** Beta-blockers are sometimes used to treat the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as a rapid heartbeat, palpitations and tremors (shaking). However, they are not psychiatric drugs so they don't reduce any of the psychological symptoms. They may be helpful in certain situations, such as if you have to face a phobia (see our page on [treatment for phobias](#) for more information).
- **Benzodiazepine tranquillisers.** If you experience very severe anxiety that is having a significant impact on your day-to-day life, you may be offered a benzodiazepine tranquilliser. But these drugs can cause unpleasant side effects and can become addictive, so your doctor should only prescribe them at a low dose for a short time, to help you through a crisis period. (See our page [about benzodiazepines](#) for more information.)

Before deciding to take any drug, it's important to **make sure you have all the facts** you need to make an informed choice. See our pages on [things to consider before taking medication](#) and [your right to refuse medication](#) for more information. Our pages on [coming off medication](#) give guidance on how to come off medication safely.

"I take medication and this helps, but I have also had online [cognitive behavioural therapy] which was invaluable and [cognitive analytic] therapy as an outpatient at a psychiatric hospital. Talking cures are fantastic tools."

How do I access treatment?

To get treatment on the NHS, the first step is normally to visit your doctor (also known as your GP). They will do an assessment, which might include asking you to fill in a questionnaire about how often you feel worried, anxious and nervous. They should then explain your treatment options to you, and you can decide together what might suit you best. (See our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) for more information on how to prepare for an appointment and having your say in treatment.)

Unfortunately NHS waiting lists for talking treatments can be very long. If you're finding it hard to access talking treatments you could consider:

- **Charities and specialist organisations.** See [useful contacts](#) for a list of organisations that may offer therapy or be able to put you in touch with local services. [Mind's Infoline](#) could also help you find services near you.
- **Private therapy.** Finding a private therapist is another option some people choose to explore, but it's not suitable for everyone because it can be expensive. (See our page on [private treatment](#) for more information.)

What if my anxiety stops me from seeking help?

It can be especially hard to access treatment if making or attending an appointment with your doctor involves doing something that causes anxiety for you. For example, you might not feel able to talk on the phone or leave the house.

Here are some things you could try:

- Ask your doctor if they offer home visits or telephone assessments. If not, they might be able to book you an appointment at a time when the surgery tends to be quiet.
- Some GP practices will allow someone else to ring up and book appointments for you (with your consent). It could also help to have someone come with you to the appointment for support.
- Depending on what's available in your area, you may be able to refer yourself for talking treatment at a local Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service. Some IAPT services are delivered over the phone. You can [search for IAPT services on the NHS Choices website](#).

You can read the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) [best-practice guidelines for treating anxiety disorders](#) in full in English or Welsh on the NICE website.

If you don't know what is wrong with you, how do you know how to fix it? For me, actually being diagnosed with anxiety and panic disorder came as a relief! It meant that I wasn't imagining the awful symptoms I'd been experiencing.

What if I don't feel better?

Your doctor should offer you regular appointments to check how you're doing, and see how well any treatment is working for you. Different things work for different people, so if a particular medication or talking treatment doesn't work for you, your doctor should offer an alternative.

If you've tried a range of treatments and none of them have helped, your doctor might refer you to a [community mental health team \(CMHT\)](#). This is made up of a number of different healthcare professionals, such as psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. Your CMHT can assess you separately and offer you a personalised treatment plan.

This is particularly recommended if:

- your symptoms are making it very difficult to carry out everyday activities
- you have a serious physical health problem or [another mental health problem](#)
- you're having thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

It's important to remember that recovery is a journey, and it won't always be straightforward. You might find it more helpful to focus on learning more about yourself and developing ways to cope, rather than trying to get rid of every symptom of your anxiety problem. (See our pages on [self-harm](#) and [coping with suicidal thoughts](#) and [recovery](#) for more information on these topics.)

How can other people help?

This section is for friends and family who want to support someone who experiences anxiety or panic attacks.

It can be really difficult when someone you care about is experiencing anxiety problems or panic attacks, but there are things you can do to help.

Don't pressure them

Try not to put pressure on your friend or family member to do more than they feel comfortable with. It's really important to be patient, listen to their wishes and take things at a pace that feels okay for them.

It's understandable to want to help them face their fears or find practical solutions, but it can be very distressing for someone to feel they're being forced into situations before they feel ready. This could even make their anxiety worse. Try to remember that being unable to control their worries is part of having anxiety, and they aren't choosing how they feel.

"[What helps me is] calmness, acceptance – not trying to dispel it with 'rational' or 'logical' argument."

Helping someone who is having a panic attack

It's understandable to feel frightened if someone you care about experiences a panic attack – especially if it seems to happen without warning. But it can help if you:

- try to stay calm
- gently let them know that you think they might be having a panic attack and that you are there for them
- encourage them to breathe slowly and deeply – it can help to count out loud, or ask them to watch while you gently raise your arm up and down
- encourage them to stamp their feet on the spot
- encourage them to sit somewhere quietly until they feel better.

You should never encourage someone to breathe into a paper bag during a panic attack. This isn't recommended and it might not be safe.

(See our page on [panic attacks](#) for more information and tips on how to cope.)

Try to understand

- **Find out as much as you can about anxiety.** This will help you understand what they are going through. Reading [personal experiences](#) can help too.
- **Ask about their experience.** You could ask them how anxiety affects their day-to-day life, and what makes it better or worse. Listening to their experience could help you to empathise with how they feel.

“Be kind, be non-judgemental... let us know it will pass, let us know you are there.”

Ask how you can help

Your friend and family member may already know how you can support them – for example, it might help to take them out of the situation, talk to them calmly or do breathing exercises with them.

By asking them what they need or how you can help, you can support them to feel more in control themselves. Knowing that there is someone around who knows what to do if they start to feel frightened or panicked could help them feel safer and calmer.

“Reminding me to breathe, asking me what I need...”

Support them to seek help

If you think your friend or family member's anxiety is becoming a problem for them, you could encourage them to seek appropriate treatment by talking to a GP or therapist. You could:

- **Offer to help them arrange a doctor's appointment.** If they are scared of leaving the house, you could suggest they ring their GP to find out if they will do home visits.
- **Offer support when they attend appointments.** You could offer to go with them to their appointments and wait in the waiting room. You can also help them plan what they'd like to talk about with the doctor. (See pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) more information.)
- **Help them seek help from a therapist.** (See our page on [how to find a therapist](#) for more information).
- **Help them research different options for support,** such as community services or peer support groups such as those run by [Anxiety UK](#) and [No Panic](#). (See our [useful contacts](#) page for more information.) You could also call [Mind's Infoline](#) to find out more about local services.

(See our page on [supporting someone else to seek help](#) for more information.)

Look after yourself

It can sometimes be really challenging to support someone with a mental health problem – you are not alone if you feel overwhelmed at times. It is important to remember to look after your own mental health too, so you have the energy, time and distance you need to be able to help.

For example:

- **Set boundaries and don't take too much on.** If you become unwell yourself you won't be able to offer as much support. It is also important to decide what your limits are and how much you feel able to help.
- **Share your caring role with others, if you can.** It's often easier to support someone if you're not doing it alone.
- **Talk to others about how you're feeling.** You may want to be careful about how much information you share about the person you're supporting, but talking about your own feelings with someone you trust can help you feel supported too.
- **Find support for yourself.** The organisations in [useful contacts](#) are there to support you, too. It could also help to explore [peer support](#) and [talking treatments](#).

(For more suggestions, see our pages on [how to cope when supporting someone else](#), [managing stress](#) and [improving and maintaining your wellbeing](#).)

Useful contacts

Mind's services

- **Helplines** – all our helplines provide information and support by phone and email. Our Blue Light Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.
 - Mind's Infoline – 0300 123 3393, info@mind
 - Mind's Legal Line – 0300 466 6463, legal@mind
 - Blue Light Infoline – 0300 303 5999, bluelightinfo@mind
- **Local Minds** – there are over 140 local Minds across England and Wales which provide services such as [talking treatments](#), [peer support](#), and [advocacy](#). [Find your local Mind here](#), and contact them directly to see how they can help.
- **Elefriends** is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See our [Elefriends page](#) for details.

Who else could help?

Anxiety Care UK

anxietycare.org.uk

Helps people to recover from anxiety disorders.

Anxiety UK

03444 775 774 (Monday–Friday 9.30am–5.30pm)

anxietyuk.org.uk

Advice and support for people living with anxiety.

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

01455 88 33 00

bacp.co.uk

Provides information about counselling and therapy. See the BACP's sister website, itsgoodtotalk.org.uk, to find a therapist near you.

Fearfighter

fearfighter.com

A computer-based CBT (CCBT) programme for treating panic and phobias.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)

nhs.uk/Service-Search

Use the NHS service search to find psychological therapies services near you.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

nice.org.uk

Information and clinical guidelines on recommended treatments for different conditions, including anxiety disorders.

No More Panic

nomorepanic.co.uk

Provides information, support and advice for those with panic disorder, anxiety, phobias and OCD, including a forum and chat room.

No Panic

helpline: 08449 67 48 48 (10am–10pm)

nopanic.org.uk

Provides a helpline, step-by-step programmes, and support for those with anxiety disorders.

Samaritans

116 123 (24 hours a day)

jo@samaritans.org

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

Chris PO Box 90 90

Stirling FK8 2SA

samaritans.org

24-hour emotional support for anyone who needs to talk. Calls are free from all providers and do not appear on bills.

Triumph Over Phobia (TOP UK)

www.topuk.org

Provides self-help therapy groups and support for those with OCD, phobias and related anxiety disorders.

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References are available on request.