

Ideas for coping with stress & anxiety

This sheet will provide you with information on ideas for coping with depression, anxiety, stress and panic attacks. Obviously, we are all different so what works for one person may not work for you. You may want to try some of the following tips and see what helps:

TRUST YOUR OWN THINKING – the first thing that you need to remember is to trust your own thinking and listen to what your body and emotions are saying to you. For example, if you feel tired, try to go to bed or to rest. Trust that you have the inner strength to overcome whatever feeling or difficulties you're experiencing.

GET HELP – when we are depressed or upset it's easy to lose confidence or to feel self-conscious with other people. This can result in our spending too much time alone. It's important that we get help when we are feeling lonely, although this isn't always easy to do. Try to ignore negative thoughts such as being a burden or upsetting other people. Instead think about who you feel easy or comfortable with and how they can help you through a difficulty or crisis.

DIET – it can be very difficult to change our eating habits because familiar foods can be comforting. However, if you do want to try a healthier diet see if you can eat as much raw food as possible, such as salads and fresh vegetables because they are thought to give you a lot of energy and help cleanse the body. Wholegrains (like brown rice), beans (like kidney beans), pulses (like lentils) and other foods that are high in fibre (like brown bread and cereals). It may take a while for you to get used to this kind of food but it can be worth it since they give us energy.

Try to cut down your sugar intake as it is addictive and a great drain on energy and vitality. Also, drinking less tea and coffee, or if you can, try cutting it out altogether and see if this helps you to feel better.

You could try replacing them with caffeine free drinks such as herbal teas or coffee substitutes such as Caro or Barley Cup. Vitamin pills can be taken in order to build you up and replace lost vitamins and minerals. Natural remedies may also help you to sleep. These are available from pharmacists and health food shops. It is important to talk to your GP or a pharmacist if you decide to take any supplements.

SOLITUDE – we all need to be alone so that we can think about things in peace. This is particularly true for mothers or women who are caring for others. Try to get some time every day just for yourself, where you can do as you please without interruption.

WRITING THINGS DOWN/KEEPING A JOURNAL – many women have found it useful to keep a record of how they are feeling. You might find it important to keep your journal in a private place so that it's for your eyes only.

EXERCISE – this can help your circulation and get rid of excess fluid in your body. It can also release endorphins from the brain that produce a sense of well-being and calm. Some women find exercises like swimming, cycling and yoga useful, but if they don't appeal to you or you quickly feel tired, think of something else you enjoy that involves movement, like walking or dancing but don't over do it.

LETTING GO OF OUR FEELINGS – it isn't always easy to know what you are feeling and it can often be harder to express our feelings. This may be because we feel scared to let go or we live with people who don't like it when we express our emotions. However, it is important to 'get things off our chest'. Try finding someone who you can trust to talk to. Perhaps a friend, family member, counsellor or a helpline.

It may take weeks or months before any of us can talk or express how we really feel and to find out what is behind the depression or emotional pain. It is important that we sort things out in our own way, in our own time, without any pressure or expectation, and with as much support as we can find.



PANIC ATTACKS – some women have found yoga or relaxation techniques helps them to control panic attacks. You can find out more about courses through your local sports, community centres or online.

Over breathing or shallow, fast breathing can bring on panic attacks - try carrying a paper bag and breathing into it. This can calm you by increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in your blood but it must be a paper bag as a plastic bag could risk suffocation. If you feel more anxious at home, relaxation CDs or online relaxation courses could be useful to calm you.

Visualisation involves using the power of your imagination to create what you want from life by relaxing. For example, imagine what your life would be like if you were not depressed and unhappy. Then draw on the power of your mind and imagination to make it happen.

Affirmations may also help. For example, an affirmation might be 'I am safe and secure and I love and approve of myself'. Affirmations have a very personal meaning. They are new thoughts and phrases that are designed to help us nurture ourselves through triggering thoughts and feelings of love, joy, peace, self-approval, calm and tranquillity.

TO HELP YOU SLEEP – Try to get into a regular routine around bedtime. Try not to stay up even if you don't feel tired because it's important that you're body gets used to a routine. Try to stay warm. Take a hot water bottle to bed to keep you warm and soothe you. Pamper yourself and try making your bed or bedroom just how you would like it so that it relaxes and comforts you.

Try not to drink tea or coffee in the evenings as they contain caffeine; but instead see if you find malted drinks relaxing (like Horlicks) or herbal teas (like camomile tea or Good Night, which is a relaxing herbal night time drink). Aromatherapy oils can also help such as lavender oil.

Listening to soothing music or meditating before going to bed or before going to sleep maybe helpful. Reading sometimes helps particularly if it's something that takes your mind off how you're feeling. Try to make sure you're not hungry but avoid eating before you go to bed.

If you smoke, it is important to think about giving up if you can. 'NHS stop smoking' provide local courses which may help.

It's important to remember that the above ideas for coping are only suggestions, some of which will be useful and others not. It's likely that as you come to terms with whatever is troubling you, you'll experience good and bad days. Don't give up hope – things can and will get better in time and remember to look after yourself as much as you can.

