



Open Minds Therapies Service

Improving access to psychological therapies in Teesside

Introduction to



Anxiety



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Welcome to

Open Minds Therapies Service

Open Minds Therapies offers a free and confidential talking therapies service. Anybody who finds their thoughts, feelings and moods difficult shouldn't have to struggle on. Talking therapies can work for people who experience:

Anxiety and worry

Depression

Panic

Phobias

Social shyness

Stress

Trauma

Relationship problems

Anger

We can work with you on an individual basis or in a group setting. This work-book has been designed to be used with telephone support provided by Open Mind Therapies. With the support of a member of the therapy team, you will be introduced to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) based self-help to help you manage your symptoms of anxiety.

The information provided in this work-book may be enough to help reduce symptoms of anxiety for some people, however more support may be needed and you can discuss that with your therapist.

Online resources

If you prefer to access Internet-based or electronic resources, you may wish to explore:

getselfhelp.co.uk

A wealth of CBT-based resources and audio downloads

Centre for Clinical Interventions (www.cci.health.wa.gov.au)

Workbooks and short sheets focussing on common mental health difficulties

Mindshift (www.anxietybc.com/mobile-app)

A free, downloadable app designed to explore strategies for coping with anxiety symptoms (see page 29)

What is anxiety?

Anxiety happens when we feel tense or frightened about a particular situation. This causes physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating and chest pain. These symptoms are caused by the brain releasing messages to different parts of the body through nerves when we feel anxious. The nerve messages make various parts of the body work faster, including the lungs and heart. Stress hormones and adrenaline are also released when we feel anxious and this causes the heart and other muscles to function slightly differently.

Anxiety is normal and is needed in certain situations. It's part of the human condition. For example, if somebody is threatened by an aggressive person, their body will react in a way which will ultimately help to keep them safe. This is called the 'fight or flight' response and is the result of a burst of adrenaline and nerve impulses released in a stressful situation. Before a test or exam for example, anxiety can help us to perform better.

Anxiety is a problem when it:

- happens out of the blue when there is no stressful situation;
- continues when the stressful situation has passed;
- happens when the stress is minor;
- is out of control when a stressful situation happens.

How common is anxiety?

Approximately one in four people suffer with either anxiety, depression, or a combination of the two. The number of people who present at their GP surgeries with anxiety or depression is higher than those who present with any other problem. It is also known that around half of all people who live with these problems do not go to their GP at all. This could be due to not realising that their worry is excessive or they may feel that nobody will be able to help them.

What causes anxiety?

There are a number of reasons to explain why we become anxious. Some people naturally have an anxious personality and may describe themselves as "a worrier"; other people may have learned to worry for example, out of habit.

Other people may have had to deal with a number of stressful life events which results in them becoming anxious, for example divorce, redundancy or bereavement.

It could be that people are under pressure from work or home; for example family problems or worrying about finances and paying household bills.

Symptoms of anxiety

If you are suffering from anxiety you may have thoughts such as:

"I worry about everything, I get tense and wound up and end up snapping at my children"

"My mind starts to race, I feel like I'm going to lose control"

"Even before I get there I start to worry about what could go wrong. My heart starts to pound and my legs turn to jelly. I have to leave"

These are all common thoughts, anxiety affects how we feel, how we think, how our body works and how we behave. Place a tick next to the symptoms you experience regularly below:

How you feel

- Tense, stressed, uptight, unsettled, on edge
- Feeling something bad is going to happen
- Strange, woozy, detached, panicky
- Anxious, nervous, scared, worried

How you think

- Thoughts racing
- Can't concentrate
- Constant worrying
- Imagining the worst thing will happen and overthinking it
- Mind jumping from one thing to another

Common Thoughts

- "I can't cope"
- "I'm losing control"
- "I'm going to faint"
- "My legs are going to collapse"
- "I've got to get out"
- "I'm going to have a heart attack"
- "I'm cracking up"
- "I'm going to make a fool of myself"

What happens to your body

- Chest feels tight or painful
- Dizzy, light headed
- Breathing changes
- Heart pounds, races, skips a beat
- Having to go to the toilet
- Body aching
- Sweating
- Tingling or numbness in toes or fingers
- Tense muscles
- Stomach churning or "butterflies"
- Feeling jumpy or restless

What you do

- Can't sit and relax
- Snappy and irritable
- Drink more alcohol
- Smoke more
- Avoid feared situations
- On the go all of the time
- Pace up and down
- Talk quickly or more than usual
- Eat more (or less)
- Start jobs and not finish



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) model

CBT focuses on the way we think and behave, that helps us understand our feelings and our responses to those feelings.

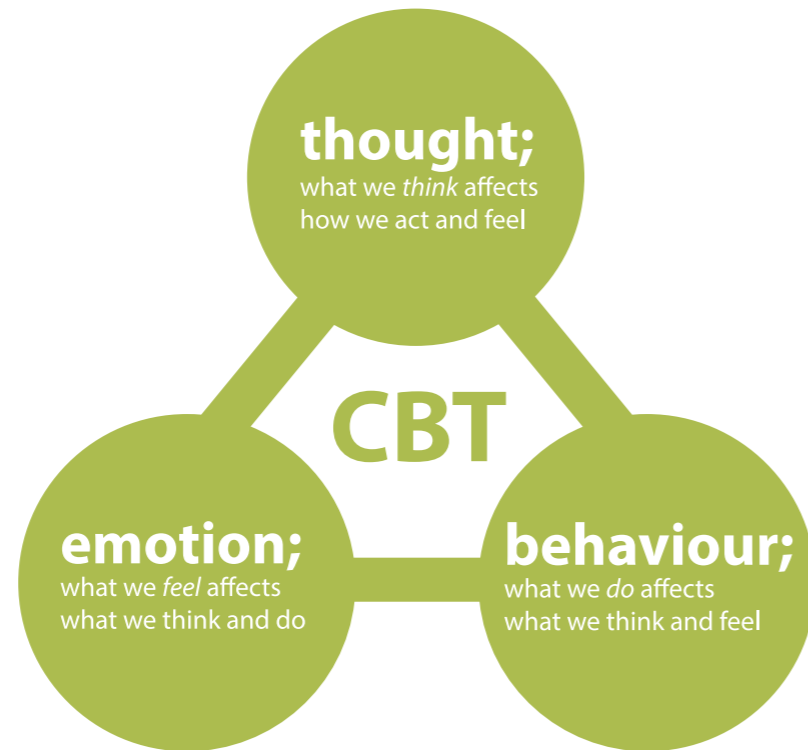
Cognitive: mental processes such as thinking.

The word cognitive covers everything that goes on in your mind; such as thoughts, memories and images.

Behaviour: everything that you do.

This includes how you act, avoid situations and what you say. Behaviour also includes not doing something, such as biting your tongue instead of speaking your mind.

Therapy: a systematic approach used to help with a problem or illness.



Here is an example of how thoughts can trigger anxiety:

Mary, 34, is currently unemployed and living with two young children. Mary's relationship with her children's father came to an end six months ago and the breakdown has affected her self-esteem and confidence in herself. Mary often feels under pressure to provide for herself and her children and finds that she feels stressed a lot of the time and worries about every little thing. Mary has been offered a job interview; the morning of the interview Mary feels anxious.

thought;

"I am going to fumble my words and look really nervous"

"They will know I am nervous and will think I'm not good enough"

"What if my mind goes blank on a question?"

emotion;

Emotional feelings
Nervous, tense, worried, scared, frustrated (at herself), sad, defeated, guilty.

Physical feelings
Heart races, breathing changes, headache, "butterflies", sweating, chest feels tight.

behaviour;

- Does not attend the interview
- Blames herself and feels guilty
- Triggers negative thoughts.

How does anxiety affect you?

Spend a few moments recording how your anxiety affects you on a daily basis.

1. Unpleasant/frightening symptoms you experience:

2. Your thoughts and beliefs about these symptoms:

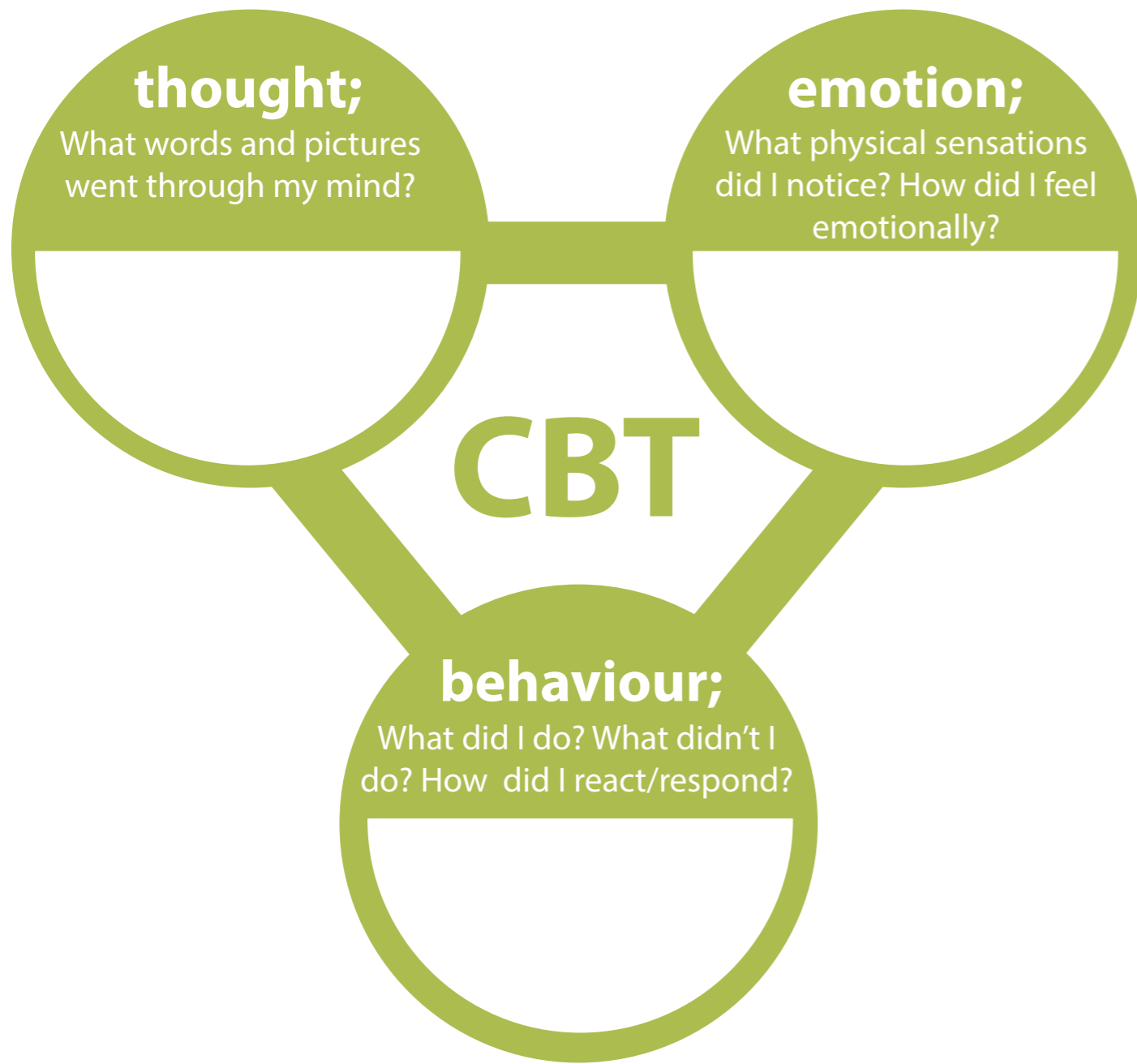
3. Everyday things that you are avoiding:

4. Current stresses in your life:



Using the CBT model to understand your anxiety.

Using your reflections on the previous page, you may wish to try to map out your own symptoms below using the CBT model:





imagining
the worst

Flight or Fight Response

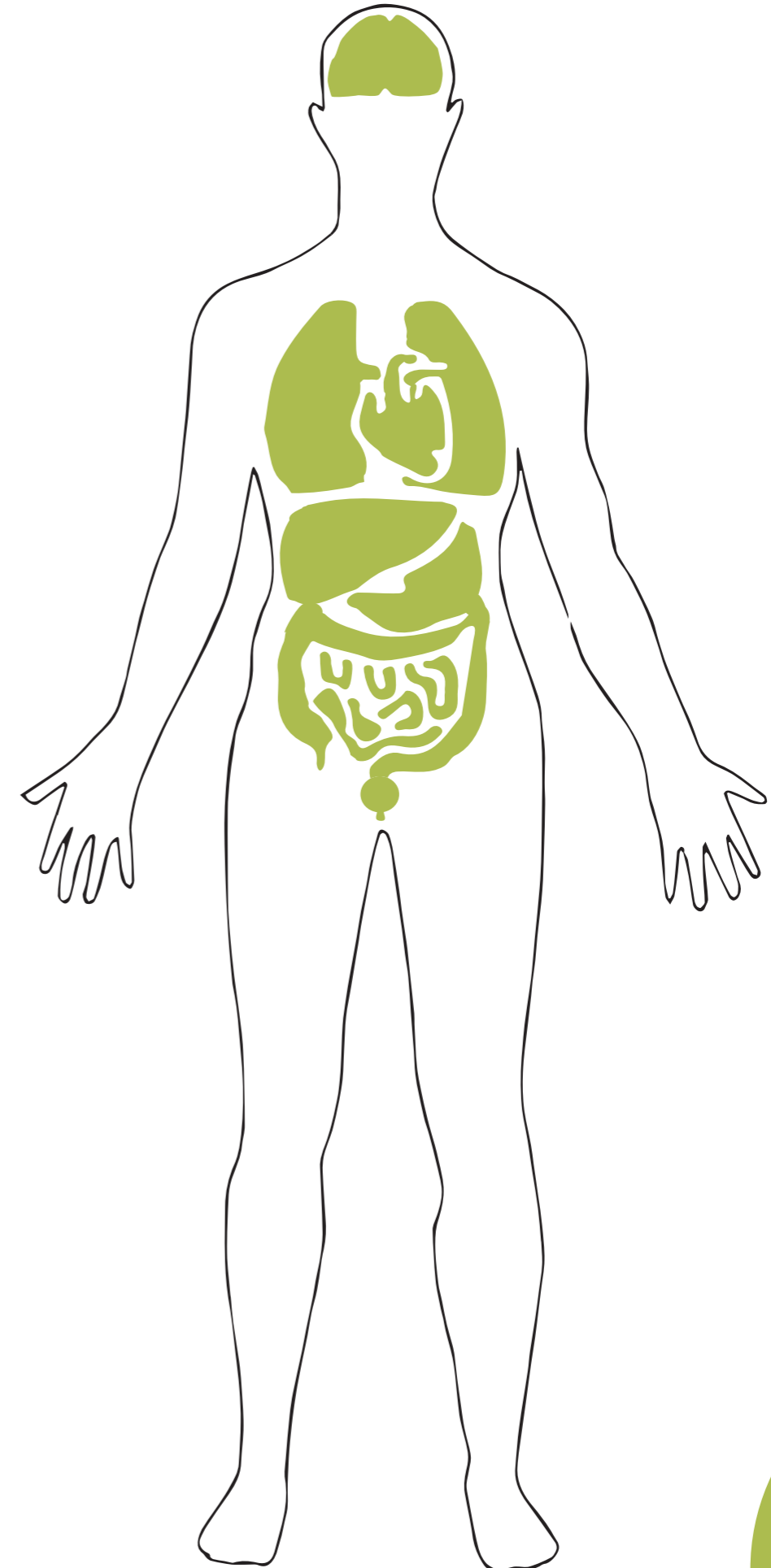
Anxiety is the body's way of responding to being in danger. It does this by releasing adrenaline into our bloodstream which will help us to either run away from the danger, or fight it. This is the body's survival mechanism which alarms us in order for us to keep ourselves safe. The primitive man would not have survived if we did not have this alarm system. Sometimes the body's alarm system kicks in when it is not actually needed and this is when the mind is telling the body that we are in danger – this is when the system triggers the flight or fight response which causes anxiety. People who feel anxious often find that they are then constantly scanning for danger when they do not need to.

The flight or fight response dates back to the beginning of human history and still applies today. It is just as important to know where it all began as it is to understand how to reduce anxiety. The flight or fight response is built into our genes and has been a human instinct since the times of cavemen. An example would be if a man was approached by a pack of wolves, he would either try to run away or fight the wolves to stay alive. Whichever option he chooses would mean that he needs every muscle and body part to work together as quick as possible in order to survive.

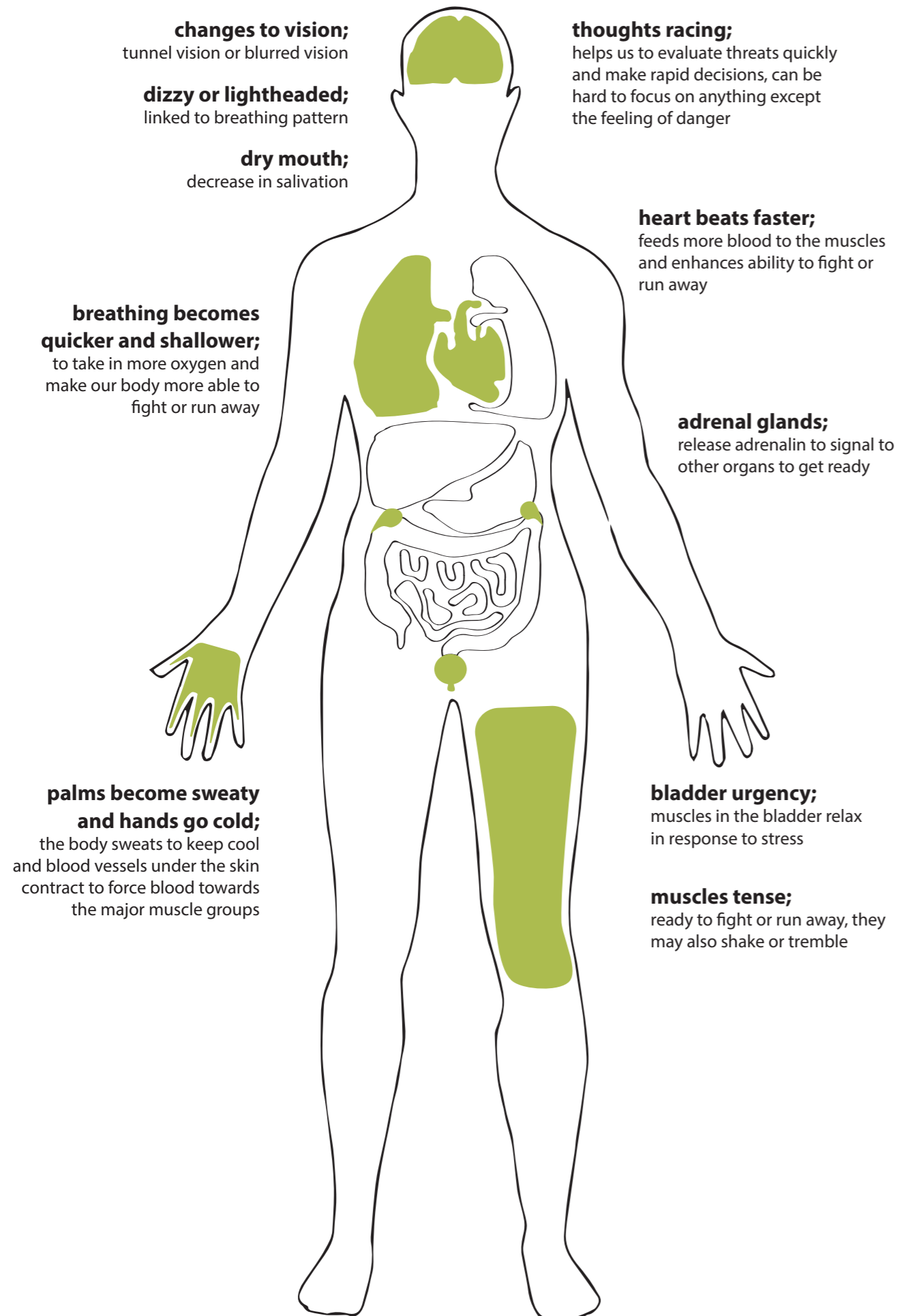
Think of a situation when you have felt very angry or worried. How did you feel?

Where in your body did you notice these sensations occurring?

Try recording on this human body where you feel your symptoms of anxiety:



Body responses to flight or fight



changes to vision;
tunnel vision or blurred vision

dizzy or lightheaded;
linked to breathing pattern

dry mouth;
decrease in salivation

thoughts racing;
helps us to evaluate threats quickly and make rapid decisions, can be hard to focus on anything except the feeling of danger

heart beats faster;
feeds more blood to the muscles and enhances ability to fight or run away

adrenal glands;
release adrenalin to signal to other organs to get ready

breathing becomes quicker and shallower;
to take in more oxygen and make our body more able to fight or run away

palms become sweaty and hands go cold;
the body sweats to keep cool and blood vessels under the skin contract to force blood towards the major muscle groups

bladder urgency;
muscles in the bladder relax in response to stress

muscles tense;
ready to fight or run away, they may also shake or tremble

Common physical sensations which can be associated with anxiety

Dry Mouth

This is due to a decrease in salivation, which occurs as a result of reduced activity in the digestive system. In a life-threatening situation, it is less important to digest our own lunch than to escape becoming someone (or something) else's!

Blurred Vision

Our pupils dilate (widen) so that if we are running away from danger at night-time, we are better able to see where we are going. During the day, dilated pupils allow too much light into the eyes and this can lead to blurred vision.

Dizziness/ Feeling faint or 'unreal'/ Inability to think clearly/ Headaches

Over-breathing (hyperventilation) leads to the concentration and expansion of different blood vessels. Blood is diverted to the muscles and away from the brain. A lack of blood in the brain leads to the symptom listed above.

Neck & Shoulder Tension/ Shaky arms or legs

Our muscles prepare for action by becoming tense. After a time, this can lead to tension and/ or shakiness.

Tightness in throat/ Difficulty swallowing/ Nausea/ Stomach cramps/ Diarrhoea/ Urge to urinate

Excess weight is a hindrance in situations of danger. Consequently our body makes it more difficult for us to eat. We also feel the need to go to the toilet or be sick.

Chest pain: In order to make our muscles most effective, we need to increase the amount of glucose in our blood. A by-product of the release of glucose from the liver is lactic acid, a chemical which causes muscular pain (felt in the chest among other places).

'Butterflies' in the stomach

This sensation corresponds to release of adrenalin from the adrenal glands, which are located just above the kidneys.

Pounding heart

The heart beats faster and harder in order to increase the flow of blood to the muscles. Blood carries both glucose and oxygen, which the muscles need to create the energy needed to fight or flee.

Flushed or pale skin

Small blood vessels contract or expand in different parts of the blood to the muscles. This helps us to fight or run away.

Shortness of breath/ fast, shallow breathing

This occurs in order to provoke physiological changes that are necessary to move blood to the muscles. Breathing out a disproportionate amount of carbon-dioxide makes the blood more alkaline and this leads to the constriction of certain blood vessels and the expansion of others.

NB: Doctors used to recommend breathing into a paper bag so as to reintroduce carbon-dioxide into the blood. However, this is no longer recommended and 7/11 breathing is used instead: In for 7 seconds through the nose and out for 11 seconds through the mouth, repeat for 5 minutes.

Sweating

This serves two functions. First, the skin is made more slippery so that it is harder for an attacker to grab us. Second, the body heats up the longer it is aroused and sweating serves to cool us down.

Pins & needles/ cold hands and feet

Blood is directed away from the skin and the hands and feet (by contracting blood vessels). This is because if we are injured by an attacker, we are less likely to bleed to death. This can lead to a 'tingling' sensation and cold skin.

Tired & Achy

The fight or flight response involves many psychological changes, which prepare the body for action. Because these changes require a lot of energy, we are often left feeling tired and achy afterwards.

Maintaining factors

There are many factors that can contribute to our anxiety or keep it going. These could include our patterns of thinking, difficulties in relationships or finding it difficult to express our point of view or feelings. These can act as triggers for us feeling anxious.

Negative thinking styles

Over the years we can develop unhelpful thinking habits. These thinking habits often occur just before and during distressing situations and can be a powerful influence on the way we feel. Once you are able to notice these negative thinking styles, you can begin to challenge them yourself using the questions below. See if you can recognise your own thinking habits in the information below (*adapted from getselfhelp.co.uk*)...

Mental Filter

When we notice only what the filter wants or allows us to notice, and we dismiss anything that doesn't 'fit'. Like looking through dark blinkers or 'gloomy specs', or only catching the negative stuff in our 'kitchen strainers' whilst anything more positive or realistic is dismissed.

Ask yourself *Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? Am I wearing those 'gloomy specs'? What would be more realistic?*

Judgements

Making evaluations or judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for.

Ask yourself *I'm making an evaluation about the situation or person. It's how I make sense of the world, but that doesn't mean my judgements are always right or helpful. Is there another perspective?*

Mind Reading

Assuming we know what others are thinking (usually about us)

Ask yourself *Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What's the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?*

Emotional Reasoning

I feel bad so it must be bad! I feel anxious, so I must be in danger

Ask yourself *Just because it feels bad, doesn't necessarily mean it's bad. My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts – and thoughts are just automatic brain reflexes.*

Prediction

Believing we know what's going to happen in the future.

Ask yourself *Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely will that happen?*

Mountains and Molehills

Exaggerating the risk of danger, or the negatives. Minimising the odds of how things are most likely to turn out, or minimising positives.

Ask yourself *Am I exaggerating the risk of danger? Or am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How else would someone see it? What's the bigger picture?*

Compare and Despair

Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and comparing ourselves negatively against them.

Ask yourself *Am I doing that 'compare and despair thing'? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?*

Catastrophising

Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen

Ask yourself *Ok, thinking that the worst possible thing will definitely happen isn't really helpful right now. What's most likely to happen?*

Memories

Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress right now.

Ask yourself *This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it's not actually happening again right now.*

Shoulds and Musts

Thinking or saying "I should" (or shouldn't) and "I must" puts pressure on ourselves, and sets up unrealistic expectations.

Ask yourself *Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?*

Black and white thinking

Believing that something or someone can only be good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey'.

Ask yourself *Things aren't either totally black or totally white – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?*

Critical self

Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our responsibility.

Ask yourself *There I go, that internal bully is at it again. Would most people who really know me say that about me? Is this something that I am totally responsible for?*

Thought challenging

We can continue to challenge our negative thoughts by reviewing them and looking for evidence that either supports them or disputes them; this will help us to have a fairer perspective.

Whenever you notice you feel particularly anxious or low, it could be a good idea to write down your thoughts.

You can also record:

1. The situation – what happened and what were you doing?
2. The feelings and emotions you felt
3. How strong were the feelings on a scale of 0-100%

(0% = not at all, 100% = extreme)

Write down how true you think each of your thoughts are, using the same 0-100% scale.

Once you have collected your thoughts, write down how each one has made you feel.

Take the first one and write it on a separate sheet. Treat this as if you are in a court of law and write down all of the evidence supporting your thought and all of the evidence against your thought. Remember we need facts and not opinion in order to be able to obtain a fair and realistic result.

Ask yourself:

- “Am I blaming myself for something that is not my fault?”
- “If a friend or partner were giving evidence what would they say?”
- “If I have rated the belief in my thought as 75% that means that there is 25% of doubt – what makes up that other 25%?”

Once you have gathered all of the evidence, rewrite the thought.

Now rate the belief you have in that thought again using the 0-100% scale.

If your thought has not changed you could always ask a friend for a different perspective.

Keep practising with your thoughts and use your diary to collect and challenge them.

As you gain experience with doing this skill, you can try to challenge the thoughts as soon as they occur.



How to reduce physical symptoms and challenge avoidance

When we are experiencing high levels of anxiety, this is often coupled with intense physical sensations and unpleasant thoughts. It can therefore be a natural response to want to leave the situation making us anxious (e.g. being in a crowd) and avoid re-entering those situations in future. This can start to undermine our confidence to face situations.

Consider this:

- How did you feel on your first day in a new class at school?
- How about on the second day.....?
- And the third....?
- The second week.....?
- The second month.....?

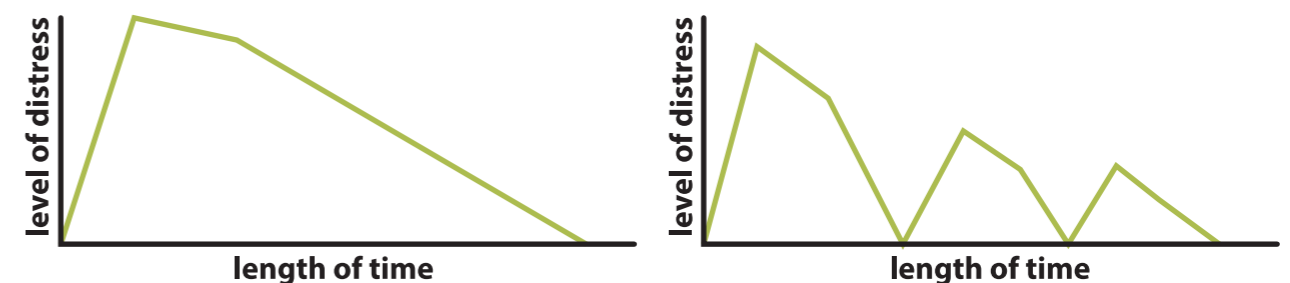
Hopefully, you will have observed that any anxiety experienced on the first day reduced over time.

“Graded exposure”

This process of getting used to something is called ‘habituation’. Many people deal with their anxiety by avoiding a particular situation which causes their anxiety; facing your fears gradually can be useful in combatting this anxiety. Avoiding anxiety provoking situations helps us feel better in the short term as we do not experience the symptoms of anxiety, but in the long term it strengthens our anxiety and avoidance increases in effect forming a vicious cycle.

Exposure therapy helps to combat this avoidance as it teaches us to face our fears and expose ourselves to the situation that is causing us anxiety. The graph below displays how this works. When we are faced with a stressful situation, our anxiety levels increase which causes us distress. After a while of being in that particular situation our anxiety levels will start to decrease gradually.

If we did not avoid the stressful situation our anxiety levels would rise sharply but then decrease as time passed by. The next time we then put our self in the same situation, our anxiety levels would not be quite as high and the symptoms would pass quicker.



(Diagrams adapted from getselfhelp.co.uk)



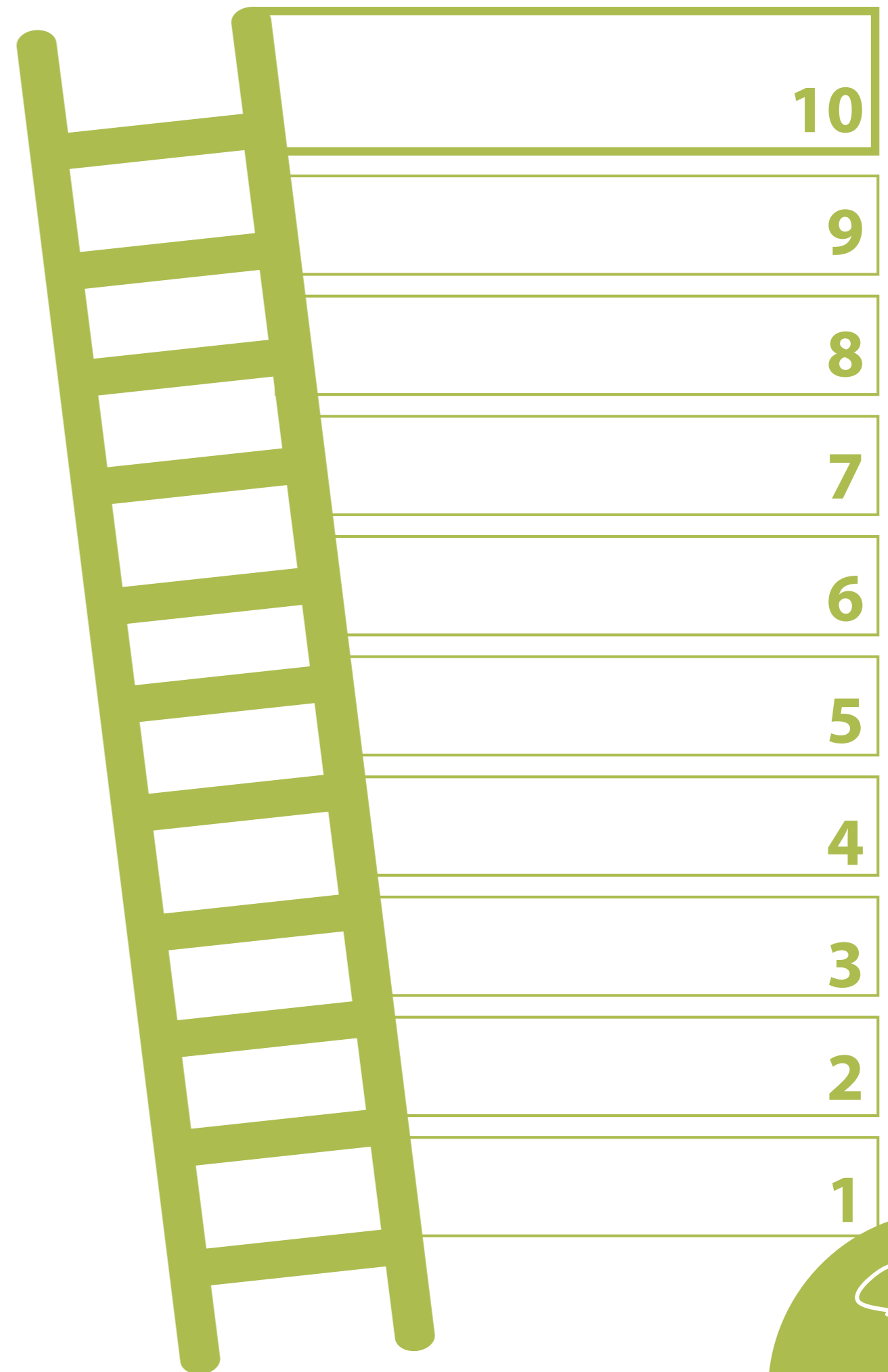
today is
the day

Anxiety Ladder

When facing a difficult task our emotions often sometimes cause us to feel overwhelmed and to cope with these feelings we might avoid or 'put off' doing a task, this is related to anxiety. If somebody had a phobia of being in crowded places their goal may be to go shopping on their own. They may feel that the most difficult situation they could be in would be to be in a crowded supermarket at the busiest time of day, on their own. Instead of aiming for this, the future goal could be broken down in to smaller, more manageable chunks...

1. The first step could be to go to the supermarket with a friend late at night when it would not be as busy.
2. Once they feel comfortable with doing this they could progress to the next step which may be to go to the supermarket at that time of the day alone.
3. Eventually they would be able to build up the confidence to reach their personal goal. This can be described as climbing up the 'anxiety ladder'. It is important to keep exposure challenging but not too overwhelming.

Record on the anxiety ladder opposite your most feared situation at the top and all of the smaller steps you could complete first, in order to reach that end goal.



Relaxation

Learning to calm your breathing habits and relax your muscles can help to reduce the general levels of anxiety. If you practice relaxation and breathing techniques regularly you will be able to use them effectively to help calm yourself down in anxious situations.

It is important that you prepare for relaxation as there are some points to keep in mind. This will help you focus effectively by preparing your mind, body and your surroundings for relaxation:

Environment

Try to minimise the distraction to your five senses. You can do this by turning your phone onto silent, turning off the TV and dimming the lights to try and create a quiet, relaxing environment. It is understood that for people who have young children this could be a struggle, but try to create your own 'quiet time', perhaps when the children are in bed.

Internal Factors

Avoid practising progressive muscle relaxation after consuming alcohol or drugs as this may hinder your progress as the results will not be as effective. It would also be a good idea to wait a while after a heavy meal as you may not feel completely comfortable.

Make yourself comfortable

Try to make sure that you are as comfortable as you could be before beginning the relaxation techniques. This could include wearing loose clothing and taking off your shoes and sitting in a comfy chair.

Physical Injuries

If you have any injuries such as sporting injuries it would be a good idea to speak to your GP before attempting any muscle relaxation techniques. You should only practise techniques you feel comfortable with.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

As previously mentioned, when the body is in flight or fight, our muscles tense and that can lead to aches and pains. Deep muscle relaxation is a useful strategy which will help you to feel less tense and less exhausted.

Consider your own body for a moment. You may have noticed that certain parts of your body feel more tense than others when you are becoming anxious. Where do you feel tension in your body?

- Arms
- Back
- Upper Legs
- Neck
- Mouth/Jaw
- Chest
- Shoulders
- Lower Legs
- Other

One method of reducing muscle tension is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). This involves you tensing particular muscles and then relaxing them and requires you to practise this technique as often as you can.

The method is detailed across the page, but you may also wish to explore audio downloads from websites such as getselfhelp.co.uk

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Sequence

1. Right hand and forearm

Make a fist with your right hand and focus on the tension in your hand and the bottom of your arm below your elbow; hold this tension for 5 seconds. Then relax your arm and release the tension for a total of 10 seconds.

2. Right upper arm

Lift your right arm up to your shoulder; you should feel your upper arm becoming more tense the closer it gets to your shoulder. Hold this tension for 5 seconds and then release for 10 seconds.

3. Left hand and forearm

Repeat what you have done for your right hand and forearm.

4. Left upper arm

Repeat what you have done for your left upper arm.

5. Forehead

Now you will focus on your face. Raise your eyebrows as high as you can and feel the tightness in the muscles above your eyes. Hold this for 5 seconds and then release the tension for 10 seconds, focussing on them becoming smooth and relaxed.

6. Eyes and cheeks

Close your eyes tight shut and focus on the tension built up around your eyes and cheeks. Hold this for 5 seconds and release for 10 seconds; you should feel the release of tension as you relax those muscles.

7. Mouth and jaw

Open your mouth as wide as you can, as though you are having a big yawn. You may feel all of the muscles in your jaw tightening and around your mouth. When you relax this for 10 seconds, leave your lips slightly open and let your jaw hang freely.

8. Neck

Be careful as you practise this technique. Face forward and pull your head back slowly as though you are looking up at the ceiling. You should feel the muscles in the back of your neck tense and then release. This is a common area where tension builds up.

9. Shoulders

Tense the muscles in your shoulders by lifting them up towards your ears. You should focus on the tightness in your shoulders and then the difference when the tension has been released as you drop your shoulders back to a relaxed position.

10. Shoulder blades/back

Push your shoulder blades back as though you are trying to touch them together, your chest will be pushed forward. Hold the tension for 5 seconds and then release for a total of 10 seconds.

11. Chest and stomach

Breathe in deeply and fill your lungs and chest up with air. You will feel the tension in your chest and stomach muscles. Hold this for 5 seconds and then release for 10 seconds.

12. Hips and buttocks

Squeeze your buttock muscles and notice the tension in your hips and buttocks. Try not to



Controlled breathing

We rarely concentrate on our breathing but we should try to do this as often as possible. This is beneficial as when our breathing slows down it affects our heart rate and allows us to feel calmer. As previously described you should try to make your mind, body and surroundings as comfortable as possible.

Calming Technique:

- Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds
- Hold it for 2 seconds
- Breathe out through your mouth for 6 seconds

If you are still getting used to changing your breathing you could breathe in for 2 seconds, hold for 1 second and then breathe out for 3 seconds until you feel you are ready to increase this.

Mindfulness

We often try to avoid or control our worrying by blocking out or trying to stop negative thoughts but this can have the opposite effect and strengthen those thoughts instead of diminishing them. A good example would be to try to not think about a pink elephant for one minute... and we'll bet you thought of lots of pink elephants!

Mindfulness is an ancient eastern practice which refers to us paying attention to the present moment. Research has shown that practicing mindfulness regularly can be as effective as taking anti-depressants.

To begin the practice, sit down in a chair and make yourself feel as comfortable as possible.

1. Ask yourself: "What am I experiencing right now?" "What thoughts am I having?" "What feelings am I experiencing?" "Am I having any body sensations?"
2. Now bring your focus to your breathing. Concentrate on the feelings in your stomach as you breathe in and breathe out. You could say to yourself "relax" on each outward breath; spend between 30 seconds and 1 minute just doing this.
3. Now widen your focus to sensing your whole body. You should be aware of any sensations you feel throughout your body as you breathe. If you are experiencing any particularly strong thoughts or feelings you should acknowledge that they are there and continue to control your breathing, allowing them to drift past. Continue practising this for about 1 minute.
4. Describing your setting – In situations which cause us to feel anxious, it can be helpful to describe where we are and what we can see in great detail. An example of this could be if we are sat in a restaurant feeling anxious as we are not familiar with our surroundings; we could describe that as, "I can see black and white checked tiles on the wall opposite me and I am sat in a booth with my partner sat opposite me. The seat I am sat on is red leather and I can feel the coldness of the material. I can smell food cooking which is coming from the kitchen. I can hear people talking, I am ok". It is helping to use our sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing so we can pay attention to the present moment.

Worry time

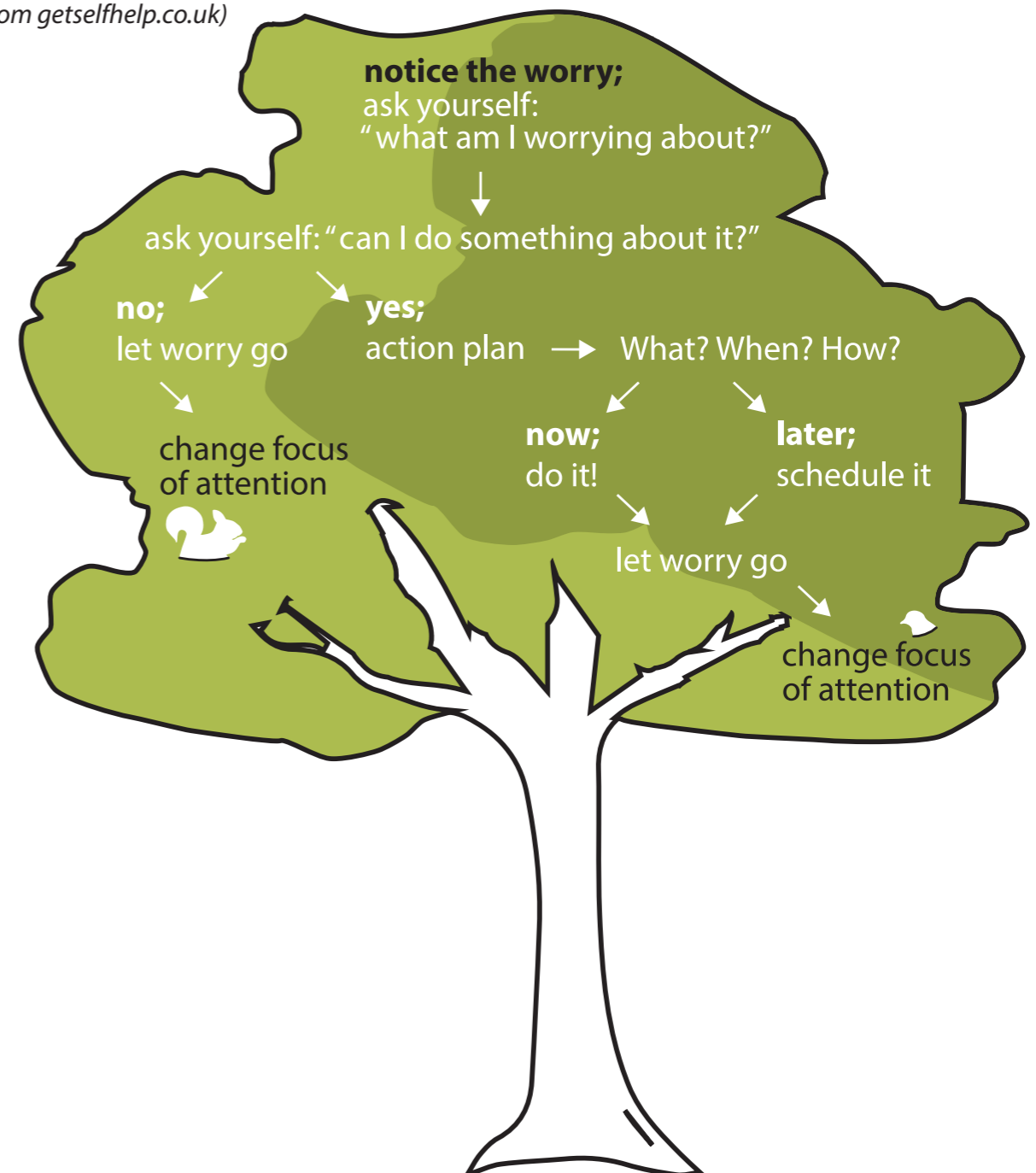
Anxiety often causes us to overthink things which can trigger further anxiety. In times of intense

or excessive worry it can be useful to give ourselves 'worry time'. This could be at the same time every day and helps us to take control of the worrying and do something with it.

1. Give yourself a 30 minute time slot every day to do your worrying. Try not to make this too close to bedtime, perhaps around tea time or early evening would be a good time. This time is set aside for you to worry about everything that has caused you anxiety or bothered you over the past 24 hours.
2. Write down on a notepad every worry that comes in to your mind. You will then have a collection of every little thing that has worried you throughout the day.
3. In your designated 'worry time' you should review each of your worries; by the time you're 'worry time' comes around some of the issues may be no longer exist and you can cross them off your list straight away. You can then ask yourself, "Can I do anything about this worry?"

You could also try to follow the worry tree...

(from getselfhelp.co.uk)



Making positive change

Even small changes to your lifestyle can have a huge impact upon your anxiety levels. Read through the following and see if any of these areas could be improved in your own life.

Exercise

There is a large amount of research which shows the benefits of exercise upon our wellbeing. Exercise does not only help us stay fit and healthy, it can also help combat stress and lift our mood. Hormones are released when we exercise which help how we feel. Although we may feel better after one session of exercise, it is important to maintain this routine if possible and exercise as often as we can.

Exercise does not have to be strenuous, guidelines suggest 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day is good for our health. This could be split up so that you go for two 15 minute walks each morning and evening.

Exercise does not mean you have to join your local gym; the idea of this may seem too much to some people. Instead you could:

- Walk around your local park
- Jog or run
- Swimming
- Yoga class
- A bike ride
- Aerobic DVD

Can you think of any other ways you could exercise which would seem ok for you to practice?



Worry bucket

It is important to maintain a healthy balance between the stressors we face in life and the activities we do to reduce some of that pressure. Some things in life which cause us stress can not be changed easily, such as finances or housing problems.

Instead of focussing on this we could instead focus on ways we can reduce our overall stress levels, through doing meaningful activities or by distracting ourselves from our worry. We could view this as drilling some "holes in the bucket"



Types of stress

major life events;
e.g. bereavement/redundancy/ moving house

daily/ regular;
e.g. communications/disputes with neighbours/
paying bills

internal stressors;
caused by how we think about ourselves e.g. "I
should be able to cope", "I always fall to pieces"



When our bucket becomes full, we can become vulnerable to experiencing low mood or anxiety.

Take some time to think about the types and amount of stress in your bucket

Now think about how you might be able to drill some holes in the bucket...



Holes

talking;
e.g. ringing my friend for support

space;
e.g. going for a walk or drive

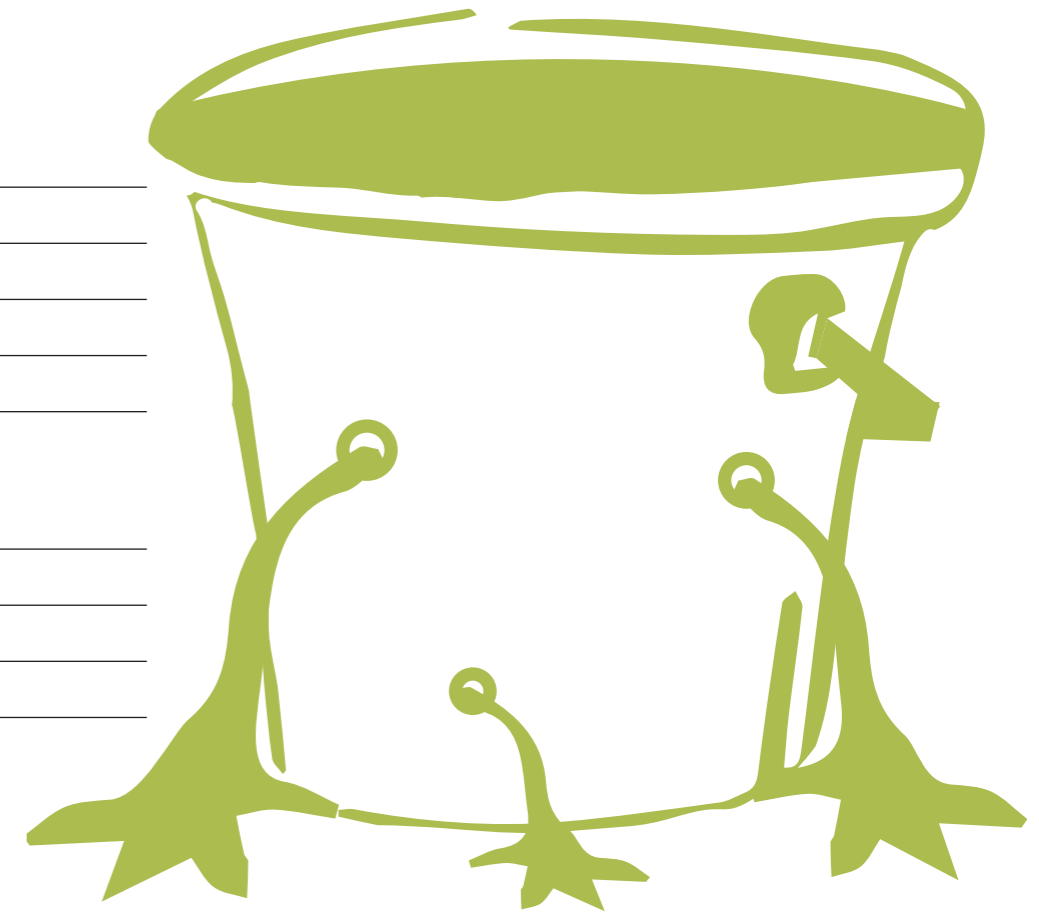
distraction;
e.g. writing a poem

hole one;

hole two;

hole three;

hole four;



Meaningful activities

We all have our own ways of coping with the things life throws at us; some ways of coping may be healthier than others.

Below are a few examples of meaningful activities which could be introduced to your life to help reduce stress and anxiety levels:

- Laughing
- Relaxing
- Going to a party
- Gardening
- Listening to others
- Going to the beach
- Walking
- Driving
- Sewing
- Music
- Sightseeing
- Writing
- Reminiscing
- Swimming
- Lighting candles
- Tennis
- Jigsaws
- Puzzles
- Dancing
- Family time
- Doing something new

Relationship and Communication difficulties

Sometimes, difficulties in our relationships with others can contribute to our anxiety. Feeling anxious can also impact on our relationships and makes it difficult to voice what we think and feel.

Examples could include:

- Being in conflict with an employer
- Being more irritable with a loved one

- Feeling less able to say “no” to requests for help
- If this feels like it is happening for you, please let us know. Open Mind Therapies delivers a 5 week course called ‘Express Yourself’ which you might be able to access before or after your agreed therapy. This course explores helpful ways of communicating.

Caffeine

Caffeine is most commonly associated with coffee but is also present in tea, fizzy drinks and even hot chocolate; with diet versions containing more caffeine. Medication such as cold and flu tablets and other painkillers also contain caffeine; pro-plus tablets have a high level of caffeine in them.

Caffeine affects the central nervous system and can help keep us awake and feel more alert. If you are already experiencing anxiety symptoms you should try to limit the amount of caffeine you drink.

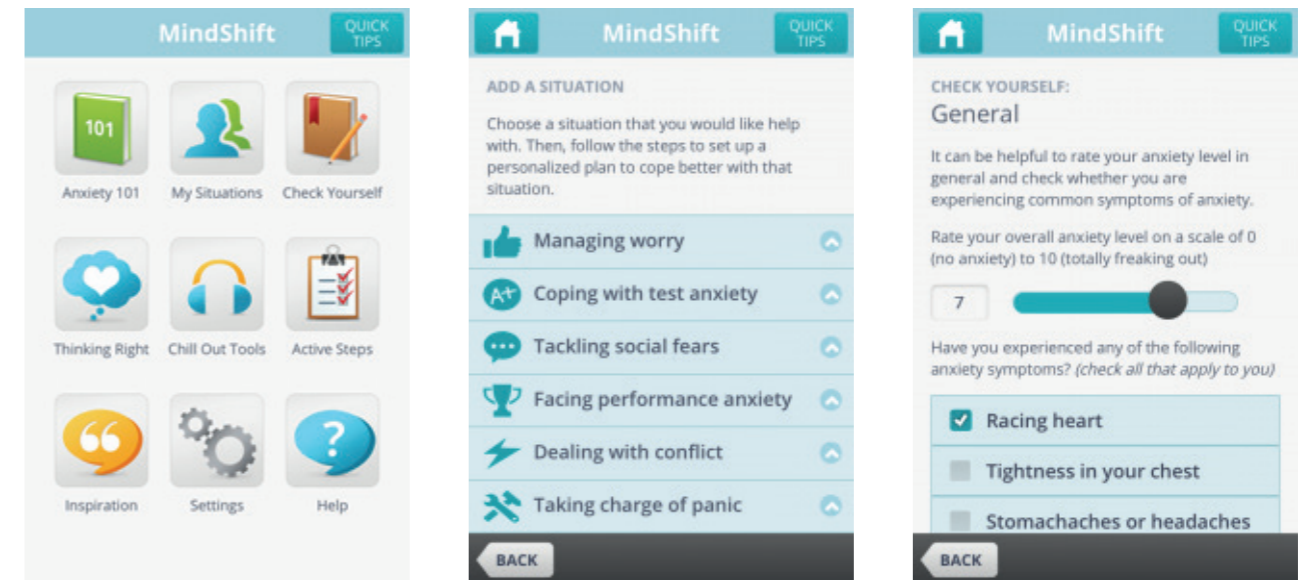
Caffeine can affect you in the following ways:

- Feeling nervous
- Irritable
- Shakiness
- Flushed face
- Headaches
- Heart races
- Faster breathing
- Poor sleep

If you do decide to reduce your caffeine intake you should reduce this gradually as it is possible to experience withdrawal effect which may cause you to have headaches, anxious, low in mood or extremely tired. You could begin by trying decaffeinated drinks instead or drinking fruit juice instead of fizzy drinks.

Mindshift App

‘Mindshift’ can be downloaded on your mobile phone. It has useful tips and an audio function for when you are out and about; this would be particularly useful if you are trying to face your fears and combat your anxiety in busy places away from your own home.



www.anxietybc.com/mobile-app

MindShift will help you learn how to relax, develop more helpful ways of thinking, and identify active steps that will help you take charge of your anxiety. This app includes ways to deal with everyday anxiety, as well as tools to tackle:

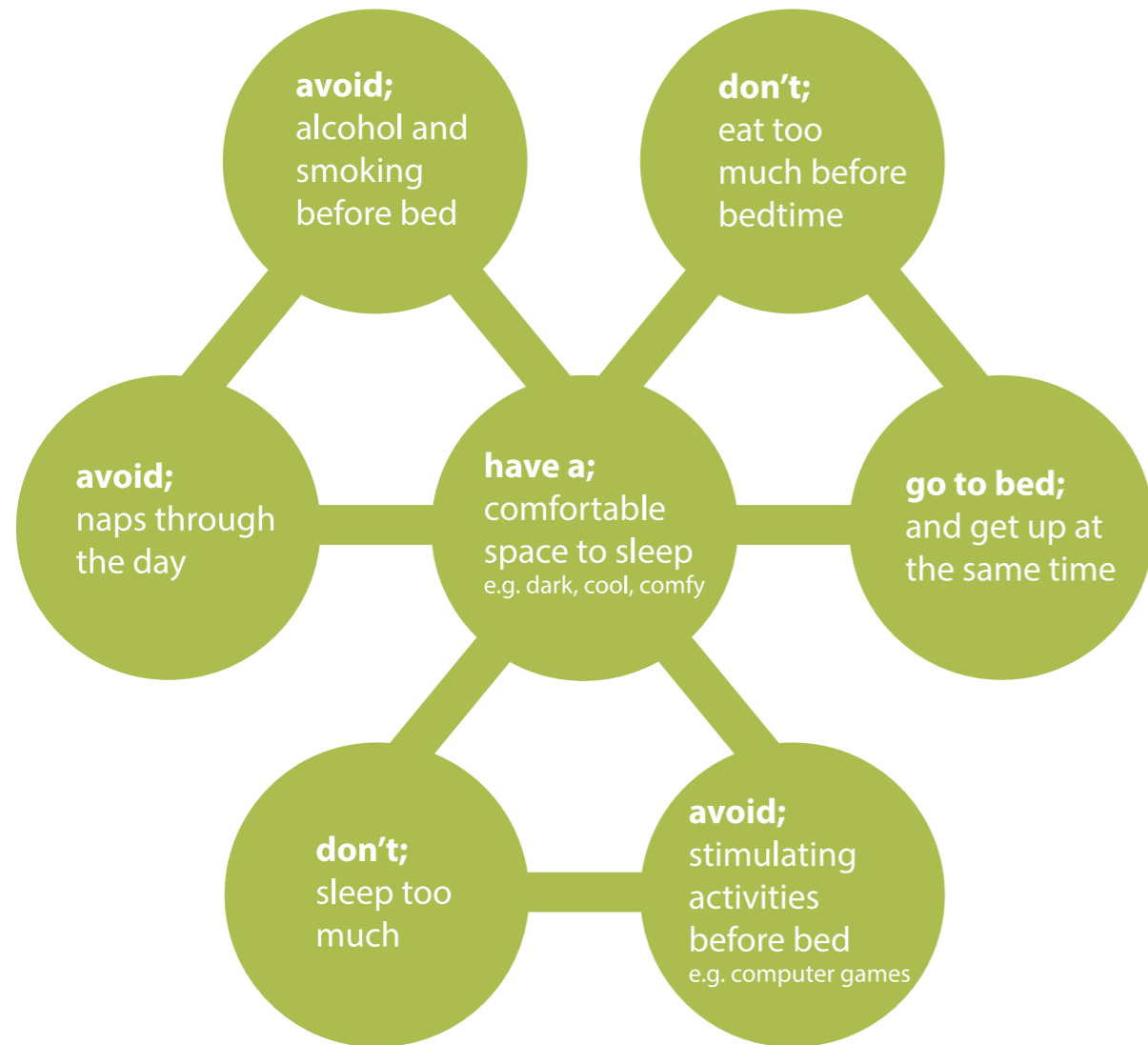
- Test Anxiety
- Perfectionism
- Social Anxiety
- Performance Anxiety
- Worry
- Panic
- Conflict

MindShift is the work of a joint collaboration between AnxietyBC, a Canadian non-profit organisation devoted to increasing the public's awareness and access to evidence-based resources on anxiety disorders, and BC Mental Health & Substance Use Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.

Sleep

When we are stressed or anxious our sleep pattern often changes, which can then cause further anxiety and distress. It is often assumed that we need around eight hours sleep each night but research shows that this is not actually the case. The amount of sleep we need differs from person to person. Some of us are able to function normally on four hours sleep and some of us need around 9 hours each night.

As we grow older we tend to need less sleep but this is also dependant on what we have done throughout the day; if we have been very active during one day, it's likely we will need more sleep as we will be more tired.



Types of Anxiety

Social Anxiety

This is when we feel anxious around other people and in social situations, often crowded or new places.

Generalised Anxiety

Constant or chronic worry about anything and everything, this often seems uncontrollable.

Panic Attacks

In certain situations we may feel intense symptoms of anxiety which causes a panic attack.

Phobias

This occurs when we are faced with something we have a particular phobia of e.g. spiders, heights or confined spaces.

Health Anxiety

Excessive worrying about our health and thinking that our symptoms are worse than they actually are e.g. if we have a headache it must be related to more severe brain issues.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

This occurs when we think about a traumatic event which triggers anxiety and other distressing symptoms.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Anxiety symptoms are triggered when we have distressing thoughts which urge us to carry out rituals e.g. checking doors and doing things a certain number of times.

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Open Minds Therapies Service

Improving access to psychological therapies in Teesside

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