

Anxiety in the Workplace

What is it and what can you do to manage it ?

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What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling of fear or imminent disaster and is a normal emotional response to danger.

Everyone feels some anxiety at different times during their life. It becomes a problem if you feel so anxious that it interferes with your normal day-to-day activities, including work.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorders, affecting nearly one in seven (14.4%) Australian adults over a 12-month period.

Anxiety Symptoms



- **Physical response (arousal of CNS)**
 - racing heartbeat, rapid breathing, dry mouth, sweating, trembling, muscle tension and headaches, upset stomach or nausea, difficulties concentrating, sleep problems, aggravation of other health problems or illnesses (e.g. dermatitis, asthma).
- **Cognitive response**
 - worrying or constantly thinking that something bad is going to happen, interpreting situations negatively, expecting the worst.

Anxiety Symptoms cont.



- **Behavioural response**
 - avoidance (missed work days, avoiding tasks), uncharacteristic behaviour such as aggression, restlessness, irrational behaviour such as repeated checking of work, difficulties coping with change, perfectionist behaviour (taking a long time to complete tasks).
- **Emotional response**
 - worry, irritability, distress, feeling upset, oversensitivity.



Causes of Anxiety

There is no single cause of high anxiety – a number of factors can contribute to the development of anxiety.

- Hereditary Factors – family history.
- Personality Style.
- Life experiences/events.
- Thinking and coping style – social learning.
- Biochemical factors.

Tools/Tips for Managing Anxiety



- **Lifestyle Changes**

- ✓ reduce stressors
- ✓ increase exercise
- ✓ improve self care (take time out, regular breaks, mental health days?)
- ✓ Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake
- ✓ learn time management skills

- **Relaxation Strategies**

- ✓ **Breathe** – slow down your breathing (breathe in for 3 counts through nose and out for 3 counts – repeat for 2-3 minutes)



Tools/Tips cont.

- ✓ Find ways at work to ground yourself – go for a walk outside or around the building, listen to music
- ✓ stretch to reduce muscle tension
- ✓ consider regular massages

- Thought management techniques
 - ✓ challenge your negative or unhelpful thoughts and expectations
 - ✓ accept what you can and can't control
 - ✓ acknowledge your humanness!
 - ✓ learn ways to distract or shift focus away from unhelpful thinking (mindfulness techniques)

Tools/Tips cont.



- Talk to someone

- ✓ bottling things up is likely to increase your anxiety even further – talk to someone you trust (colleague, manager, supervisor, friend, partner)
- ✓ seek professional help if your anxiety is significantly impacting on your functioning i.e you've missed a lot of work, your health or relationship is suffering.

Options for further support



- **Counselling can be an effective way to treat anxiety – the most common and effective type of counselling to assist with anxiety is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).**
- **Counselling can be organised through most workplaces through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – eligible for up to 6 sessions of free counselling with a registered psychologist or clinical psychologist. Speak to your manager/co-ordinator if you feel comfortable. Information should also be available in your staff manual or orientation pack about how to access this.**

Options for further support cont.



- **Speak to your GP – they can assist you to link into a counsellor. Medicare now offers rebates for counselling under a program called Better Access to Mental Health Care – eligible for up to 12 sessions of counselling. Medication can also be useful in some cases where anxiety is serious. A GP can assist with this.**



Resources

Beyond Blue

www.beyondblue.org.au

Australian Psychological Society

www.psychology.org.au

Anxiety Online

www.anxietyonline.org.au

Centre for Clinical Interventions

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au

Reach Out

www.reachout.com

“How can I keep my heart open without going under”

