

ANXIETY AND PANIC ATTACKS



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Feeling on edge? Tense? Nervous?

Feeling anxious is usually a response to difficult or unknown situations, such as an upcoming exam or asking someone out on a date. Our senses heighten to deal with such situations. Once the event or danger has passed, our body relaxes. However, anxiety can become so persistent or severe that it interferes with our day-to-day activities.

Some of the most common symptoms of anxiety are:

- Mind racing – inability to concentrate on any one thing, or stuck on one concern to the exclusion of all other thoughts
- Breathing is rapid and shallow
- Can't relax
- Disturbed sleep, especially difficulty in falling asleep
- Limbs shaking
- Lack of patience - irritable
- High state of alert and sensitivity to what is going on around you - jumpy
- A sudden need to “get out of here” to somewhere safer
- A sense of losing yourself; lack of control; panic; fear
- Sweating
- Dizziness, fainting
- Feeling overloaded - cannot cope with another thing
- A sense of being trapped, and will never get out of this state
- Mistrustful of others



Anxiety can be very useful; it is like a warning of danger.

Threat triggers a chemical response in the body that heighten your alertness. This prepares you for action that will protect yourself: it is a survival instinct. The body can tolerate this response as long as it gets recovery time afterwards. Problems arise when the body is not returning to a relaxed state; to use a common phrase “the nerves get a bit frayed”.

Anxiety is no longer useful when it disables you.

If the fear is unknown, or you fear being anxious then you are likely to get overloaded. Symptoms like those mentioned above can occur.

People experience anxiety in different ways. This can range from general anxiety that persistently affects life, to acute forms of anxiety involving intense but limited periods of fear commonly known as panic attacks.

Experiencing a panic attack can be very scary because the symptoms described above appear to come on so suddenly and with such force. However, it is important to remember that panic attacks are just your body's response to high levels of the chemicals (mainly adrenaline) being released due to anxiety. It is your body's way of letting you know that you need to make changes that will reduce your anxiety levels.

Am I Caught in an Anxiety Trap?

Since anxiety can be very unpleasant and scary it is not unusual to become scared of becoming anxious again in the future. Unfortunately, this fear is likely to increase the chances of entering an anxious state again. To be fearful of fear is to risk being caught in an anxiety trap. But you can get out of this trap – you just need to find what would be helpful to you.

HELP FOR ANXIETY

Firstly are you looking after yourself?

For a quick check, ask yourself the following questions:

1 Am I getting enough exercise?

Exercise is a very good way of moderating the symptoms of anxiety. It uses up the chemicals released in the body as part of the fear response.

2 Am I eating well?

Nourish your body: it needs fuel to operate properly. Neither starving your body of food or eating unhealthy food will serve your body well.

3 Am I finding time to relax?

Your body and mind need time to relax. If you are constantly busy you are likely to become worn out. Find ways of relaxing that suit you. This may be time alone or with friends, listening to your favourite music, curled up on the sofa with your duvet and book/magazine, or anything else that helps you relax.



4 Am I doing too much?

Take stock of all the things that you do – are there things that can be put on hold or given to someone else? Make attempts to lighten your load – doing too much may result in you not being able to do anything.

5 Am I worrying needlessly?

It is worth considering whether your worries belong to you – for example do you carry other people's worries as if they were your own? Also are there worries that could be lessened by sharing them with the right person/people.

If these questions have highlighted areas of your life that need some adjustment then maybe you need to take action.

Counselling is available at Abertay University for all registered students.

Secondly, enlist the help of others.

You do not have to cope with anxiety on your own.

Think of people that have helped before, particularly those who have a calming influence on you – maybe a friend, family member or tutor.

Avoid people who make you more anxious!

If your anxiety is interfering with your normal abilities to cope with life then you might consider approaching your doctor.

Many consultations at doctor surgeries are prompted by anxiety that the patient is experiencing. Doctors are familiar with the symptoms of anxiety and panic attacks.

Your doctor may help by listening to your concerns and offering you some guidance and reassurance. In some circumstances the doctor might recommend medication to calm some of the symptoms of anxiety.



Counselling can be helpful in many ways:

- Talking to someone about your anxiety who is not involved in your personal life. This may be especially important if you worry about how your friends, family, etc. will react to your anxieties.
- Feeling less alone – the counsellor will seek to understand how you experience anxiety.
- Exploring the impacts of anxiety on your life.
- Seeking ways of coping with anxiety that suits you.
- Investigate the sources of your anxiety.
- Find ways to limit the effects of anxiety on your life.

Information on how to contact the Student Counselling & Mental Health Service is given at the end of this booklet.

You might find it useful to read about anxiety and panic attacks, and also related subjects such as stress and relaxation.

Most libraries and good book shops have a selection of titles on these topics, usually in the Health, Self-help, Popular Psychology or Medical sections. It is best to pick a book that seems to fit your needs.

Here are some suggestions:

- Weekes, C (1995) Self-help for your nerves. Thorsons, London.
- Ingham, C (2000) Panic Attacks. Thorsons, London.
- Trickett, S (2001) Coping Successfully with Panic Attacks. Sheldon Press, London.



Each book is aimed at helping you help yourself by explaining what is happening to you when you feel anxious/nervous/panic. They give practical advice on what you can do. The first title is relevant to all types of anxiety, whereas the latter two (as their titles suggest) focus on panic attacks.

In addition to this leaflet on Anxiety and Panic Attacks, the Student Counselling & Mental Health Service has other leaflets that might be helpful to you.

The leaflet on Stress describes the symptoms of stress, things that can create stress and ways to manage stress. The leaflet on Relaxation guides you through a relaxation programme that you can practice on your own.

There is also a booklet on Depression - it is not unusual to experience depression and anxiety together.



STUDENT COUNSELLING & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

How to make contact

The Counselling Service is part of Student Services based at the Library. Counselling is free and available to all registered students. You can book an appointment by emailing **counselling@abertay.ac.uk**. Alternatively, speak to staff at the Support Enquiry Zone (SEZ) on level 1 of the Library.

The service also includes a Mental Health Nurse Advisor (RNMH) who can work with you if you are experiencing or are concerned about any diagnosed mental health issues.

The Student Counselling & Mental Health Service is open Monday to Friday, 9.00am - 5.00pm all year round, except when the University is closed during the Christmas vacation. The University believes that all employees and students have the right to expect, and that it has a responsibility to ensure, that no individual will be disadvantaged as a consequence of their age; disability; gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins); religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation.

If you feel that you require an appointment as soon as possible, please email **counselling@abertay.ac.uk**. Appointments are based on staff availability, but we will try to see you within a few days. If it is an emergency, please refer to the resources listed below for urgent support details.

CONTACT

Student Enquiry Zone

Level 1, Library Building, Abertay University,
Bell Street, Dundee, DD1 1HG

E: counselling@abertay.ac.uk

T: 01382 308 805 or 01382 308 833



Abertay University Wellbeing App:

Scan the QR code to download the app from the app store



Useful Websites:

- studentsagainstdepression.org
- Student Mental Health website - thinkpositive.scot

Self Help Resources:

- Living life to the full - littf.com
- Mental Health Foundation website with excellent podcast downloads - mentalhealth.org.uk



Helplines:

If you want to talk to someone about your emotional difficulties and are feeling despairing or suicidal there is help day and night, you can contact:

- **Breathing Space:**
breathing.space.scot
T: 0800 83 85 87
- **Saneline:**
sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/helpline
T: 0845 678 000
- **The Samaritans:**
samaritans.org
T: 116 123
- **Give us a shout:**
TEXT 85258
Here for you 24/7
giveusashout.org



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ENQUIRIES:

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Level 1, The Library Building,
Abertay University,

Bell Street, Dundee DD1 1HG

T: 01382 308805/01382 308833

E: counselling@abertay.ac.uk

EQUALITY STATEMENT:

The University Equality Policy
can be found at:

abertay.ac.uk/about/theuni/diversity

