

## Further help and information

For more information or advice please contact the SPCMH Team on **0141 232 2555** or visit the website [www.glasgowspcmh.org.uk](http://www.glasgowspcmh.org.uk)

The SPCMH Team are a Primary Care Mental Health Team covering the South of Glasgow City. The team offer a variety of services to help people with common mental health problems and help them to untangle their thoughts and emotions.

## ANXIETY

# *feeling uneasy?*

*We'll help you untangle your anxiety and help you get back on the right path to wellbeing.*

# CONTENTS

**Section 1: What is anxiety? 3 - 10**

**Section 2: Anxiety and the body. 11 - 18**

**Section 3: Anxiety and behaviour. 19 - 30**

**Section 4: Anxiety and thinking. 31 - 38**

**Section 5: Review. 39 - 40**

**Section 6: Pathways resources. 41 - 45**

## SECTION 1: WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is linked to what people call 'nerves' or 'stress'. It affects us all, and is normal in a range of situations such as public speaking, or sitting an examination. In some situations a certain amount of anxiety is helpful – such as crossing a road; if we didn't feel any anxiety, we could just walk out and be involved in an accident. However, when anxiety becomes very severe, and occurs when there is no reason for it, then it has become a problem.

## Types of anxiety problems

There are many different types of problems involving anxiety, ranging from phobias to panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If you would like to learn more about these problems, contact the Pathways team and they will send you out some more information.

## Why me?

Anxiety has many causes. You may feel you are a '**born worrier**', or your family may have tended to worry a lot. But for most people anxiety develops over a long time from lots of little problems and events. A build-up of stress and strains can trigger anxiety, particularly if you are physically run-down or not eating or sleeping properly. It is also common that a specific stressful life event can cause anxiety to develop. The table below helps you to begin to think about some life events that may have happened to you.

## Stop & Think

Tick the life events that have been around for you over the past 12 months. Remember these are just a few so write others down if they are not on the list.



### Stressful life events

Death or illness in the family	
Relationship break-up/divorce	
Moving house	
Personal illness/long term health problems	
Pregnancy or a birth in close family	
Pressure or changes in work	
Money worries	
Being a carer	
Problems with your home or neighbours	
Others:	

## How anxiety affects us

Anxiety can affect us in four main ways and each can influence the others.

### It affects our bodies

Many people are first aware of the physical signs of anxiety such as a fast heart-beat, breathlessness, sweating, muscular tension, headaches, or dizziness. It may be that you have been to your GP to have this checked out.

### It affects how we think

When you feel anxious, you may be aware of what you say to yourself (I'll never be able to do that) or your thoughts might be concerned with what might happen. Typically, someone with anxiety may think:

**What if...** I get so tense I can't speak?

**I can't cope with...** standing in a queue.

**How do I get out of...** this shop?

### It affects how we feel

If we experience anxiety regularly we can feel sad, irritable, fed up and tired.

### It affects how we behave

Anxiety affects how we behave in situations we fear.

It might cause us to:

**Avoid things we find difficult:** For example, staying away from certain places or people, putting off making decisions or paying bills.

**Be on the go all the time:** Buzzing around at full speed and getting tied up in knots.

## Understanding anxiety

These areas (body, thinking, feelings and behaviour) are all tied to each other and each can affect the other.

Let's look at an example to illustrate.

Imagine you are walking home alone and are faced with a group of young men walking towards you. Many people may immediately jump to the conclusion (**thinking**) that they might say something nasty to you or even attack you, which naturally would cause you to **feel** anxious or panicky. So what you think has affected how you feel. You might begin to notice changes in your body, your heart racing and feeling sweaty. You may decide to walk faster or cross the road to avoid them (**behaviour**).

The following diagram links the areas together to make sense of what happens when we have strong emotions of anxiety.



This diagram shows us that what we **think** about a situation affects how we **feel physically** and **emotionally**, and changes what we do, (**behaviour**).

This booklet deals with how to identify and cope with the bodily symptoms, changes in behaviour and worrying thoughts associated with anxiety.

## When anxiety becomes a problem

We have learned that anxiety is common, but it can get 'out of control' and become a problem. This happens when anxiety occurs repeatedly with no real threat, or when it goes on long after the stress is over. Here are some examples:

**Cameron is at work. When he finishes the task he's working on, his boss says "That's fine Cameron, but can you try and do it a bit quicker next time?" Walking away, he can feel his muscles tensing, and he goes bright red. He starts to think "Was that slow? Why am I so rubbish at this? Why can't I get it right." He starts to worry that he'll get sacked, and then his family will get into debt. He can't stop worrying about it, and he develops a headache. He starts making mistakes in his job. By the end of the day he's still tense, and has started to feel sick as well.**

In this example we can see anxiety affects Cameron's thinking, his feelings, his body and his behaviour, which leads to a change in his performance.

**For years Craig has had a fear of dogs, even small ones. He has never been attacked by a dog, but every time he sees one he thinks it will attack or bite him. If he sees someone walking a dog in the street he always turns around and walks away as quickly as he can. He can't concentrate or breathe properly until he is in a safe place away from the dog.**

Again, the way Craig sees the situation, the way his body responds, and how he behaves contribute to make his anxiety worse.

Anxiety develops like a habit – the thinking and the behaviour become natural and automatic in a wide range of situations.

## Stop & Think

### Ask yourself

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| • Does anxiety affect my everyday life? | Yes / No |
| • Is it very strong, or very frequent?  | Yes / No |
| • Does it last for a long time?         | Yes / No |
| • Am I struggling to control it?        | Yes / No |
| • Is it getting worse?                  | Yes / No |



If you find yourself saying "Yes" you may be experiencing unhelpful levels of anxiety.

## What keeps the problems going?

**Association:** When people become anxious in one setting, they often start reacting in the same way in similar places.

**Anticipation:** If you have been anxious in some situations, it's natural to worry about it happening again. Worrying about things ahead of time can make things worse and can start to affect many parts of your life.

**Avoidance:** Not facing up to things that make you anxious. If you keep avoiding your fears, you are unlikely to overcome them.

## Stop & Think

### What makes anxiety worse?

There are some things in our daily lives which increase the chance of experiencing anxiety. Look down the following list- ticking what you have experienced, and areas you would like to work on.



### What makes anxiety worse

Being under constant stress	
Major life changes	
Caffeine-how many cups? (also in fizzy drinks, and medicines)	
Alcohol and hangovers	
Drugs	
Poor diet, not eating enough	
Poor sleeping patterns	

## **What can I do to get better?**

There are several useful ways to help people manage anxiety problems.

The first step is recognising you have a problem, and being willing to make some changes in your life.

Remember the box above you ticked which listed some of the things which make anxiety worse. A useful first step is to change the things you can do easily. For example if you are aware that you are drinking over 6 cups of coffee a day, try to reduce this to no more than 3 cups. Once you have made these changes, and still experience anxiety, it can be useful to look at other ways to manage anxiety:

### ***Self-help***

A good first option is using self-help materials – like this booklet. This way you learn on your own about problems you might be facing and how to deal with them. In this booklet we will look at 3 areas of anxiety – the body, thoughts, and behaviour – and learn some skills to help you break the loop of anxiety and tackle your difficulties.

### ***Medication***

Several types of medication are available to treat anxiety. Your GP will be able to discuss medication with you. You can also find out a lot about medication from leaflets, websites and phone lines which are listed at the end of this booklet.

### ***Psychological (talking) therapies***

The most widely used and best researched type of therapy for anxiety is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT aims to help identify, unravel and change the unhelpful thinking and behaviour which can keep anxiety going.

## **SUMMARY**

**Anxiety can be triggered by stressful life events.**

**Anxiety can cause problems if it is intense, long lasting, or comes at the wrong time.**

**Anxiety can affect us in four ways which are all linked:**

- **The way our body works.**
- **The way we behave.**
- **The way we think.**
- **The way we feel.**

**Certain things make anxiety worse such as major life changes, alcohol, poor diet.**

**There are several types of help available; self-help booklets, medication, and psychological treatments.**

## SECTION 2: ANXIETY AND THE BODY.

When we feel anxious, a chain of automatic events occur in our bodies that prepare us for action. This is often called the fight or flight response and can be traced back to our need for survival in the past.

Remember the previous example when you are walking alone down a quiet street at night and you see a group of young men coming towards you. For most people this is a potentially anxiety provoking situation, and you may start to experience the physical sensations of anxiety. The following physical changes may occur:

***Your heart beats faster:*** To take blood to where it is needed most – our legs to allow us to run faster. Some people believe they are experiencing a heart attack during an episode of anxiety, but it is important to note that the heart beating faster is a normal response to stress.

***Your breathing quickens and becomes shallow:*** This helps oxygen to be carried to our lungs, arms and legs via the bloodstream. Side effects may be chest pain, breathlessness, a choking feeling or blurred vision. Although you may feel dizzy you will not faint. To faint your blood pressure has to drop. When we are anxious, because our hearts beat faster our blood pressure is temporarily raised.

***Your muscles start to tense:*** To make sure we can stand and fight or run away, the muscles tense, ready for action. After a while this may cause pain, stiffness or shaking.

More of these physical changes are listed on the following page.

## Stop & Think

Tick the sensations you have experienced.



Physical sensations	Often	Sometimes	Never
Shortness of breath			
Fast or irregular heartbeat			
Tense muscles, twitching			
Shaking or trembling			
Excessive sweating			
Feeling sick			
Feeling dizzy or unsteady			
Feelings of 'unreality'			
Feeling hot or blushing			
Butterflies in the stomach			
Can't concentrate			
Dry mouth; feeling of choking			
Hot flush			
Tingling; pins and needles			
Headaches; blurred vision			
Pains or tightness in the chest			

## Panic attacks

Panic attacks are very sudden periods of intense anxiety and can cause extreme discomfort. The symptoms are an increased experience of the feelings caused by anxiety as shown in the table above. Panic attacks can be related to a stressful event such as flying or can simply come out of the blue. Studies show the symptoms of a panic attack can last either thirty minutes or can be as short as 15 seconds. Many people experience this problem and are also able to cope and overcome it.

Although a certain amount of anxiety can be helpful, there are times when the physical sensations happen at the wrong time, for example when you're speaking in front of people, or queuing up in the supermarket. This can be unpleasant and scary, and the sensations can be made worse by the way you interpret them, and what you think is happening to you.

It is important to remember that the physical sensations of anxiety are not harmful, just unpleasant and occurring in the wrong setting.

Many people who experience anxiety often escape the situation, fearing that the physical symptoms of anxiety will get worse. When they leave the situation they find their bodies returning to normal quite quickly. It is important to remember that after some time your body will return to normal again, and this would eventually happen if you stayed in the anxiety provoking situation.

There are some techniques you can learn to help you gain control over the physical symptoms of anxiety. Controlling your breathing and relaxation are the most effective.

## **Breathing**

One of the most common symptoms of anxiety is hyperventilation or over-breathing – breathing too fast and taking in more oxygen than you need. This can cause tightness in the chest and lots of other unpleasant sensations like feeling faint.

It is important to remember that it is very unlikely that you will faint. Fainting is caused by a drop in blood pressure, whereas anxiety causes blood pressure to rise.

Breathing is one of the easiest physical sensations to control by yourself. Try controlling your breathing following the instructions on the next page.

## Stop & Think

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### ***Controlling your breathing***

- Slow your breathing down to a slow easy pace.
  - Place one hand on your chest, and one on your stomach.
  - Repeat a helpful word to yourself like 'relax' or 'calm'.
  - Breathe in through your nose counting 1...2...3... slowly, (you should notice when you breath in, your stomach should move out slightly).
  - Breathe out your mouth counting 1...2...3...slowly, (you should notice when you breathe out your stomach should move in slightly).
  - Aim to do this for at least five minutes.
  - Be careful not to tense up or gulp air to do this: keep your muscles soft and your whole body relaxed.
  - You should practice calming your breathing many times before using it to control the symptoms of anxiety. You may find it takes many attempts before you are able to breathe calmly when you feel panicky.
  - It is a good idea to practice this technique when you do not feel anxious so you that you can then use it easily when you do experience anxiety.
- 



## Relaxation

Relaxation is a very useful way of coping with the physical symptoms of anxiety. When someone has been anxious for a long time they are often unaware of the tension in their muscles, or the knot in their stomach, which is a result of the body's reaction to stress.

When we are stressed or anxious, the muscles in our bodies tense up and this can cause uncomfortable bodily feelings like headaches, backaches, or a tightness in the chest. The aches and pains of tension can cause mental worry, making us even more anxious and tense. People who are anxious and tense are often tired.

### Why is relaxation helpful?

- Relaxing slows down the body.
- If we learn to turn on the symptoms of relaxation we can turn off the symptoms of being highly strung and tense. You can't experience both at the same time.
- With practice, you can control the physical sensations associated with anxiety.
- When you have learned to relax it can make a noticeable difference to your mood and your energy, not just when you are feeling tense but at other times too.

### You might like to try to:

- Relax your muscles and avoid tightening and stiffening up.
- Avoid fidgeting.
- Keep your concentration on your surroundings – the '**here and now**'.
- Stay calm and don't rush.

If you do these things, you should find yourself slowly calming down. It might help to close your eyes briefly, and just slow down, and think.

**"Relax, I can deal with this."**

Talking to yourself in a positive way can be helpful, and you may want to say other statements to yourself- such as '**keep calm**', '**it will pass**'.

There are many forms of relaxation you can try. One of the easiest forms of relaxation is 'Progressive Muscular Relaxation' and this basically involves tensing and relaxing all the major muscle groups in the body. If you are interested in learning about this technique, and other relaxation techniques ring Pathways and request the 'Relaxation' CD and we will send it out to you. We also run one off relaxation sessions which you can attend – just phone Pathways for more details on **0141 577 7729**.

## **Distraction**

Thinking about the physical symptoms of anxiety will only make them worse. Sometimes it is useful to think about something else. Some techniques that might be helpful in distracting you are:

**Reading or talking:** Carry a book, magazine or newspaper with you to read. Talk to whoever is with you.

**Mental games:** Games that require concentration can help to distract you from stress and worry. For example, thinking of boys and girls names beginning with each letter of the alphabet, then an animal etc. Number games such as counting backwards, crosswords, and puzzles can be helpful.

**Describe your surroundings:** When you start to feel anxious, describe to yourself everything you see in great detail. For example, if you are in a supermarket describe the different aisles with the different types of products.

**Staying busy:** Giving yourself a task to do takes your mind off your worrying thoughts. Regular exercise is one of the best ways to protect yourself from stress.

**Mantras:** Sit alone in a quiet room, and try to clear your mind as much as possible. Think of a soothing word or phrase '**I am calm**', or '**Relax**'. Close your eyes and slowly repeat this to yourself over and over again. Do this for 10 minutes a day or when you feel anxious.

Although distraction can help you get through situations, try not to get too dependent on these techniques. Once you become more confident that you can cope with these situations try to do without them.

## **SUMMARY**

**There are many physical symptoms of anxiety which are unpleasant, but not harmful.**

**You can learn to manage these symptoms by learning techniques such as controlled breathing and relaxation.**

**Distraction is a useful short term technique, but not recommended in the long term.**

## SECTION 3: ANXIETY AND BEHAVIOUR.

When we experience anxiety, the way we cope with situations, and how we behave often changes. We tend to avoid certain places, situations or activities. We can also become overactive, or underactive at different times.

## Avoidance

Avoidance is a way of reducing our fears and anxieties by not facing up to or escaping from the situations we fear. It is natural to avoid the things that make you feel anxious. If you have experienced a panic attack or felt particularly anxious in a certain situation, such as the supermarket, it is only natural that you won't really want to go through that again. After a while, you may find that you begin to start avoiding these situations.

## Problems with avoidance

- If we continue to avoid our problems, they will never go away. Avoiding or putting things off is a quick fix: it does not untangle problems in the long term.
- It prevents us from learning to cope well with difficult situations, as well as learning that we will not lose control or collapse.
- Avoidance can become a habit. You can become dependent on it, and it can start to spread and affect lots of different areas of your life, lessening the quality of your life.
- Avoidance can affect your confidence. One of the worst effects of avoidance is that it eats away at your confidence. This begins when you have a few difficulties or failures in life, and you start to avoid one or two things. Over a period of time you may start to think '**I can't do this, I can't do that**', and avoid more and more different things. Confidence gets slowly worn away. After a while you may end up with low expectations about your general ability to cope in life.



## Safety behaviours

You may also do things which make it easier for you to face situations. For example:

- Using drink or drugs to help you 'get by'.
- Always taking someone with you when you go to certain places.
- Carrying medications like valium with you even if you hardly ever use them.

These are known as '**safety behaviours**'. They seem helpful, because they allow you to get through difficult situations. The problem is that you may become dependent on them, and believe that you can't do things on your own.

## Stop & Think

Think for a moment of any safety behaviours you do.  
Ask a friend or relative - as they may notice them more than you.



Imagine you were able to do the things you were avoiding. Write your responses in the space provided.

How would you feel differently?

How would you think differently about yourself?

What would people notice about you?

How would people around you feel differently?

## Dealing with avoidance

The best way to deal with avoidance is to build up your confidence bit by bit, by gradually trying to cope with the things you find difficult. The first time you try spending time in a feared situation you will probably feel anxious, and it might last a while. Then hopefully the second time it won't be so bad and will fade away quicker.

With time and practice your anxiety will gradually become less severe, as you start to gain control over it. Tackling your fears in this way is known as graded exposure. Try using this step by step approach to something you have been avoiding. Look at Jean's example below to help you work out the steps.

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### Stop & Think

#### Avoidance task

Make a list of the situations you find difficult, or avoid. Pick one type of situation from the list – like anxiety about going to busy places and write it in the space provided below, beside Jean's entry. Then write the steps you would need to take to tackle this anxiety. Write a list from easiest to most difficult



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#### STEP 1

The steps should be things which are:

- Realistically possible.
- Things you feel you should be able to do.

#### STEP 2

Try tackling the situations on the list one at a time, starting with the easiest.

#### STEP 3

Practice spending time in the situation. Try to stay long enough for your anxiety to decrease.

#### STEP 4

Practice the easier ones again and again until you feel you can cope well with them. Relaxation skills and controlled breathing will help you here.

#### STEP 5

Gradually move on to the more difficult items on your list of situations using the same techniques.

## Jean, who is anxious about going to busy places

Standing outside house when it is quiet	
Walking to post box near house	
Going to local shop at a quiet time	
Going to local shop at a busier time	
Going to supermarket at a quiet time	
Going to supermarket when it is busier	
Going into a shopping centre at a quiet time	
Going into a shopping centre when it is busier	

### Tips for practice

- Set daily goals and targets.
- Make these specific. For example, look at the example of Jean in the table. One of the situations listed is go to supermarket at a quiet time. A useful target for this might be - 'spend 10 minutes at the supermarket'. This way you know exactly what to do and when you're going to do it.
- Practice controlled breathing and relaxation before leaving the house.
- Expect to find it difficult, but try not to give up. The feelings will get better over time.
- One practice won't be enough to rebuild your confidence – be prepared to keep at it. You might have to do the same step lots of times on different days.
- It's better not to leave big gaps between your practice sessions – try to do a bit every day.
- If you get really anxious during a practice, don't think you are getting worse instead of better; we all have good and bad days. What's important is that overall you are making progress.

## Stop & Think

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### Reviewing

It's important to review how each practice went, and it can help to ask yourself the following questions:



- What did you notice when you were carrying out the task you set yourself - how did you feel, what were you thinking?
  - What did you do that helped it go well?
  - How did you feel after you carried out your plan?
  - Was there anything you would do differently next time?
- 

It can be helpful to keep a diary of how you are getting on – and to jot down responses to the questions above. Keeping track of these things will help you to learn more about what works for you and what doesn't. This way your skills will improve more quickly.

- Remember to give yourself a pat on the back when you do well. Reward yourself for your efforts!
- Share your success with friends and family.

### Other anxious behaviours – activity levels

#### Overactivity

Being overactive means rushing around at full speed all day, trying to do too many things at once. It's a common way that people react to anxiety. It may also mean being unable to unwind and relax, unable to sit still for two minutes, and can lead to feeling bad, highly strung, irritable and totally exhausted.

## Stop & Think

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### Ask yourself

- Are you trying to do too much?
  - Do I have to be doing something every minute of the day?
  - Who or what am I doing this for?
  - What's the worst thing that will happen if I do not get this done today?
  - Not unwinding and relaxing/no time for yourself?
- 



Think about these questions, and about what other people do. Typical days tend to have regular breaks – for coffee, lunch, or just because there is nothing to do. There are busy times and there are quiet times.

### Dealing with overactivity

You can either make a daily list of what you would like to do, or you could use the activity record (overleaf), or your own diary to plan the week ahead. Try to be realistic about what you can achieve in a day, and remember that it's important to chill out and do nothing sometimes.

- Stick to one task at a time and see it through to the end – don't jump from one unfinished job to another.
- Include plenty of rests and breaks in your day.
- Set aside some time to do something for yourself in the evenings, something restful and enjoyable.
- Be reasonable about what can be done. Remember you're not superhuman.
- Be pleased with what you have achieved; don't focus on what you haven't managed to do.

## Activity record

There is an example filled in below to show you how to complete it.

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	Take dog for a walk	Go shopping Make dinner	Visit friend
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

## Stop & Think

### Review

After you have completed the first week, ask yourself:

- What did you do that helped it go well?
- How did you feel after you carried out your plan?
- Was there anything you would do differently next time?

It can be helpful to keep a note of how you are getting on - and to jot down responses to the questions above.

Continue to do this on a weekly basis as it will allow you to see progress. Keeping track of these things will help you to learn more about what works for you and what doesn't. This way your skills will improve more quickly.

## **Underactivity**

### ***What is it?***

When people feel anxious they often get tired easily and can't be bothered doing things. This can happen especially when we feel 'snowed under' by things to do. People often tend to give up their hobbies and things that give them pleasure. Being underactive can act to worsen or keep the feelings of stress going.

It can lead to not feeling good about yourself, thinking that you are not contributing, and lead to feelings of worthlessness.

### **Stop & Think**

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Think about how you spent your time in the last week:

- When were the times you felt better about yourself?
- What were you doing?
- Did you have time for you?



### ***Tackling underactivity***

Increasing your activity by a small amount every day can also help to lift your mood.

Getting back to doing something you used to enjoy will have great benefits to you.

## Stop & Think

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Imagine you were able to do the things you enjoyed or gave you a sense of achievement.

- How would you feel differently?
  - How would you think differently about yourself?
  - What would people notice about you?
  - How would people around you feel differently?
- 



## Steps to overcome underactivity

- Make a list of the things you have stopped doing.
- From the list choose the easiest one to tackle first.
- State clearly and specifically what it is you are going to do.
- Plan the steps and carry it out.
- Do it and review it.

Peter had been experiencing anxiety for some time, had gradually stopped going out and was spending most of his time in the house. See below how Peter tried to increase his activity levels.

### STEP 1: What have you stopped doing?

I have stopped going for a walk.  
I have stopped going out with friends.  
I have stopped cooking.

### STEP 2: What is easiest to tackle first?

Going out with friends.

### STEP 3: State what you are going to do

I will arrange to see one of my friends this week.

### STEP 4: Plan the steps and carry it out

Phone Joe on Monday evening about 6pm.  
Plan to say I would like to go out for a drink at the local pub.  
Suggest we meet up on Friday.

### STEP 5: Do it and review it

This went well. I phoned my friend, and suggested going out and we arranged to meet on Friday. I felt a bit anxious about going out – but remembered how much I had enjoyed talking to my friend in the past.

## Stop & Think

### Planning your day

So we can see by making specific achievable plans and stringing them together, Peter managed to take the first steps to going out.



You might want to try organising a routine for a day this week. Think about the ideas in the 'Activity Levels' section as you do it. Remember to be realistic and include breaks. If you can, discuss the routine with a close friend or relative to see what they think of it. Here's an example:

### Saturday

Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Have a relaxing bath	Wash the dishes and the kitchen worktops	Visit friend
Eat breakfast	Make up some lunch	Cook dinner
Take the dog for a walk		Go and see my friend
		Relax before bed

### SUMMARY

- Anxiety can make us avoidant, overactive or underactive.
- Try to identify what you are avoiding.
- Gradually tackle your avoidance – writing down exactly what you will do, taking small steps.
- Tackle over activity by planning your day with plenty of breaks.
- Tackle under activity by planning your day – planning activities for every day.
- Review how you got on.

## SECTION 4: ANXIETY AND THINKING.

Many people experience worrying thoughts from time to time, but can usually cope with them without getting all tied up and letting them get in the way of their enjoyment of life.

People, who experience anxiety, on the other hand often experience anxious or unhelpful thoughts a lot of the time. Although each person's situation is different, many people with anxiety do often share the same basic fears, e.g. fears about not being able to cope or of being a failure.

Such fear or thoughts we have can play a major role in increasing or reducing anxiety. Unhelpful thoughts can make us feel physically anxious (racing heart, feeling sick, knotted stomach) which can then lead to us worrying more.

## What are unhelpful thoughts?

Anxious thoughts have certain features:

- They are automatic - and seem to come from nowhere.
- They seem reasonable at the time, and often you accept them without question.
- They are hard to stop.
- They are the kind of thoughts that if they were true, would make most people feel anxious.

## Types of unhelpful thoughts

These can take many different forms.

**What you say to yourself:** I will collapse if I have to wait in a big queue at the shop.

**Images in your head:** Seeing yourself lying on the shop floor.

**Memories:** Remembering an image of someone who had collapsed in a shop.

## Typical anxious thoughts

**“What if ...”** These refer to always thinking about what could go wrong: What if nobody talks to me at the party? What if I mess this up? What if I can't tow the line?

**“I can't cope with ...”** These refer to both the physical symptoms of anxiety and the situations in which anxiety occurs: **“I can't deal with this”,** or **“I'll never manage.”** These thoughts reduce our self confidence even more and may make us give up before trying.

**Thoughts about the physical symptoms of anxiety:** These thoughts come from misunderstanding the physical feelings of anxiety. Examples include **“I'm going to faint”,** **“Am I having a heart attack?”**. These thoughts happen because people imagine something serious must be happening to cause the physical feelings they are having.

**Escape thoughts:** These are the sort of thoughts that make you want to get out of the situation quickly, and may lead you to avoid it or similar situations in the future. **“I'll be fine if I just get out of here.”**

## Identifying anxious thoughts

When you feel anxious, take time to unravel and examine what is going through your mind. Often it is hard to do this as so many thoughts go through your mind all the time and can become muddled up. However, you can train yourself to notice them. One way of doing this is to use a thought diary.

### Thought diary

A thought diary provides a way of recording your thoughts. At first, try to think of a recent time when you felt anxious; think about what you were doing, what you were feeling and what you were thinking. At this stage you may only be aware of the situations and the feelings but not the thoughts, in time you will learn to record your anxious thoughts.

The table below gives an example of a thought diary, and how to complete it.

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### Stop & Think Thought Diary

**Date/time:** When you had the thought.

**Situation:** This is the place where you had the thought. You may also want to note who was with you, and anything that was happening at the time, what was said.

**Mood:** How you felt at the time, for example, did you feel anxious, relaxed, or angry?

**Thought:** Write the thought. What was going through your mind at the time?

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Date/time	Situation	Mood	Thought
22 August, 5pm	In Asda, at check out queue	Anxious Panicky	My heart's beating fast, what if I collapse?

For the next week or so, write down any anxious thoughts you experience as you go about your day. Try to get into the habit of noticing them.

This can be quite difficult. Like all skills, you will get better at it with practice. So don't worry about taking a long time over this before moving on to the next section. It may be helpful to ask a friend or family member to help you - they may be able to prompt you to remember what unhelpful thoughts you experienced.

Think of yourself as a detective - trying to string together clues to what triggers and makes your anxiety worse. Carry paper and a pen with you so you can write things down just after they happen. If you can't do it at the time, try to recall and write down the thoughts as soon as possible after the event.

## Tackling unhelpful thoughts

When we are anxious, it's like we are all tied up in a ball of string. We often can't see the whole picture. We tend to focus on bad things, and can ignore information about things in life that are going well.

The next step after identifying unhelpful thoughts is to learn to untangle them, and develop a more balanced point of view. One of the most straightforward ways to unravel unhelpful thoughts is to weigh up the evidence for and against them, and come to a more realistic or balanced way of thinking.

See the example in the table below:

Thought	Evidence for	Evidence against	Positive coping thought
I am going to pass out	I am feeling light headed and dizzy. I nearly passed out the last time	I have never passed out before This is just anxiety	I've not passed out before - I can cope with this
I will look like an idiot	When I have been anxious in past I start to shake and get my words mixed up	Nobody has ever said I look like an idiot before. Lots of people are not looking at me	Its just my anxiety making me think like this - people are not paying attention to me

## What is the evidence?

You can think of it like a jury in a court case. To know the truth we need to string together information – hard facts about what actually happened (not just what we **think** about what happened).

For example, if a person who is experiencing anxiety in a supermarket thinks ‘**I am going to pass out**’, we can look at the evidence for and against this thought. Is the thought actually true?

**Evidence for:** Refers to information that you feel backs up your thought. It may be how you feel, or previous experiences.

**Evidence against:** Is all the information that doesn’t back up the thought such as – remembering the worst hasn’t happened and how you coped before.

**Positive coping thoughts:** Are encouraging thoughts that you can learn to say to yourself when you are in anxious situations.

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## Stop & Think

You can start stringing together and tackling your own thoughts by filling in the table on the next page.



Thought	Evidence for	Evidence against	Positive coping thought

It can be difficult to think through the evidence for and against your thoughts. Sometimes it can help to ask your partner or friend to help you with this task.

There are other questions to help you tackle your thinking, listed below.

### **Stop & Think**

#### ***Questions to ask yourself***

- What is the evidence, is the thought actually true?
- What alternative views are there?
- What would other people say?
- Does this way of thinking help me, or hold me back? How?
- What can I do to change the situation?

## The goal

The goal of this task is to teach you to recognise, unwind and tackle thoughts which may make you anxious. Ideally, in the end you will have learned this skill and will be able to apply it any time you need it. At the beginning it will be helpful to write the thoughts down in a table as it will help you both identify and tackle the thoughts in a structured way.

As time progresses, you may find that you may only need to note the unhelpful thought and the positive coping thought, or eventually you can learn to do this in your head.

This is not likely to happen overnight, though.

Challenging thoughts is a new skill. Like learning any new skill it will take time, and you will probably not get it right first time. Remember to reward yourself for your efforts with praise and/or treats.

If you wish to learn more about identifying and tackling unhelpful thoughts, there are several workbooks that lead you through examples of people learning to tackle their unhelpful thinking. 'Manage your mind' is an excellent workbook which is available in all libraries in the south of Glasgow, as well as bookstores.

### SUMMARY

- **Notice what you say to yourself when you feel anxious.**
- **You can learn to change unhelpful thoughts to more helpful/ positive coping thoughts.**
- **There are a number of questions you can ask yourself to help you change the way you think.**
- **It will take time to learn this new skill.**

## SECTION 5: REVIEW.

As you continue working on untangling and managing your anxiety, remember to stop and see how you are doing. You will be using a lot of new skills, and these require practice. It's always good to step back sometimes and say "how's it actually going?"

One way of doing this is keeping track of past experiences – times when you did well, times when you did less well, what you have tried and how you got on.

It is important to be realistic about your progress. It will take time to overcome stress and anxiety and to notice changes in it. Things will not run smoothly all the time. You may find yourself in a muddle and face some setbacks: this is to be expected, and they can teach you about what you can do differently next time.

## When problems won't go away

Sometimes, there are times in our lives when the problem we face just cannot be solved. Examples are ageing, getting ill or bereavement. These are things we cannot really control or prevent.

There might be more complex issues which are stopping your progress. This could be caused by emotional problems like depression, or you may still be struggling to straighten out and cope with important events in your past.

If you feel that this is the case with you, there are lots of further sources of help. You may want to look into other services offered by Pathways. Your GP may also be able to offer advice. There are also some other organisations which you can go to for support either in person, on the phone or via online access using a computer. Some of these are listed at the end of this booklet.

### SUMMARY

**Anxiety is a normal part of everyday human experience. It can cause problems if it is intense, long lasting, or comes at the wrong time. By using this booklet you have taken a huge step by acknowledging your anxiety and doing something about it.**

**Anxiety affects your body, the way you feel, the way you think, and the way you behave.**

### When you feel anxious:

- Try to stay in the situation.
- Try to breath slowly.
- Practice relaxation.
- Distract yourself.
- Tackle your upsetting thoughts.

Managing anxiety should be seen as a long-term goal. It will take practice and effort over time. You may well face setbacks and have bad days, but you can try to accept these as normal, and learn from them to keep you moving forwards.

There are lots of other sources of support which are listed on the following pages.

## SECTION 6: PATHWAYS RESOURCES.

If you feel that you have tried some of the ideas in this booklet and you are not feeling any better, there are lots of further sources of help. You may want to look into other services offered by Pathways.

The Pathways Team are a Primary Care Mental Health Team based in the South West of Glasgow. The team offer a variety of services to assist people with common mental health problems and help them to untangle their thoughts and emotions. Below is a list of the services Pathways provide.

## Pathways services

Pathways team offers a range of services:

### Healthy reading

All libraries in the south side of Glasgow stock a range of self-help books on a range of topics including anxiety and depression. You can access these either by visiting your local library or your GP can write you a prescription for the book of your choice.

### Help yourself

We have a variety of self-help booklets that you may find helpful to work through – including, anxiety, panic attacks, self esteem, sleep problems, and cutting down your drinking. Just phone Pathways and we will send out which ones you require.

### Guided self-help

Work on materials similar to this booklet, with help from a self-help support worker to guide you through it. Up to four structured appointments are available.

### Classes

**The Wellbeing class:** Runs for 4 weeks and lasts for 2 hours and 30 minutes with a break. This class will help you untangle stress by teaching you new ways to think and behave. It covers some of the ideas presented in this booklet.

### Groups

We offer a variety of small therapeutic groups, for example, low self esteem, depression and anxiety. These change every so often so give us a call or drop us a line to find out if there is a group running that can help you.

### Screening drop-in clinic

One short appointment with a Pathways team member. You can talk to this person about your problem and come up with possible solutions or if we can't help then we will point you in the direction of someone who can.

Pathways also offers brief talking therapies which you can access by being referred by your GP or it may be recommended if you have attended the drop-in screening clinic.

Pathways also offers brief talking therapies which you can access by being referred by your GP or it may be recommended if you have attended the advice clinic.

Your GP may also be able to offer advice. There are also some other organisations which you can go to for support either in person, on the phone or via online access using a computer.

**Below are listed other organisations which offer a range of services that you may be able to access.**

### **Useful reading & websites**

Self-help books (*many of these are available at your local library or can be ordered through most bookshops*)

- **'Overcoming' series** (*Robinson Press, London*)  
Titles include:
  - **Overcoming Anxiety** *Helen Kennerly*
  - **Overcoming Panic** *Derrick Silove & Vijaya Manicavasgar*
  - **Overcoming Social Anxiety** *Gillian Butler*
  - **Overcoming Traumatic Stress** *Claudia Herbert & Ann Wetmore*
- **'Overcoming common problems' series** (*Sheldon Press*)  
Titles include:
  - **Coping successfully with panic attacks** *Shirley Trickett*
  - **How to cope with stress** *Dr Peter Tyrer*
  - **Understanding obsessions and compulsions** *Dr Frank Tallis*
  - **Overcoming anxiety** *Dr Windy Dryden*
  - **Coping with Post-trauma stress** *Frank Parkinson*
- **Manage Your Mind** - G. Butler & A. Hope  
(1995) Oxford University Press, Oxford

## Anxiety

- **First Steps to Freedom:**  
0845 120 2196  
[www.first-steps.org](http://www.first-steps.org)
- **Samaritans:**  
0141 248 4488  
[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)
- **Scottish Association for Mental Health:**  
0141 568 7000  
[www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

## Practical problems

- **Legal Issues: Govan Law Centre:**  
0141 440 2503  
[www.govanlc.com](http://www.govanlc.com)
- **Financial Issues: Money Matters:**  
0141 445 5221  
[www.moneymattersweb.co.uk](http://www.moneymattersweb.co.uk)
- **Housing Issues: Shelter:**  
0141 221 899  
[www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

## Depression

- **Depression Alliance Scotland:**  
0131 467 3050  
[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)
- **Breathing Space:**  
0800 83 85 87
- **Scottish Association for Mental Health:**  
0141 568 7000  
[www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)
- **Best Treatments:**  
[www.besttreatments.co.uk](http://www.besttreatments.co.uk)

## Health, diet & exercise

- **Healthy Living:**  
0854 2 78 88 78  
[www.healthyliving.gov.uk](http://www.healthyliving.gov.uk)
- **Smoking Concerns:**  
0141 201 9825  
[www.smokingconcerns.com](http://www.smokingconcerns.com)
- **Health Education Board for Scotland:**  
[www.hebs.org.uk](http://www.hebs.org.uk)
- **Glasgow Club:**  
City-wide access to fitness clubs  
[www.glasgowclub.org](http://www.glasgowclub.org)

## Stress

- **Govan Stress Centre:**  
G51 3UL Pearce Institute,  
840 Govan Road,
- **Pollok Stress Centre:**  
0141 553 0974  
Community Flat,  
5 Levenside Crescent, G53 5JY  
(Offer massage, counselling,  
reflexology, relaxation, reiki)
- **Stress Watch Scotland:**  
01563 574144  
[www.stresswatchscotland.org](http://www.stresswatchscotland.org)

## Useful websites

### Website disclaimer

Links to related websites have been provided for information only. Their presence on the list below does not mean that the Pathways team endorses any of the information, products or views on these sites.

- **MIND**

The leading mental health charity for England and Wales, has an online bookshop of mental health information which can be ordered online.  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

- **Royal College of Psychiatrists**

Website includes information about anxiety disorders in the public information site.  
[www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)

- **Northumberland Mental Health Services:**

Provides information and advice for the most frequent mental health problems written by psychologists and others working in the field.  
([www.nnt.nhs.uk/mh/selfhelp.htm](http://www.nnt.nhs.uk/mh/selfhelp.htm))

- **Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre:**

The Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre has produced booklets.

**Titles include:**

- **Managing Anxiety**
- **Overcoming social anxiety**
- **Understanding health anxiety**
- **Understanding panic**
- **How to relax**

[www.octc.co.uk](http://www.octc.co.uk)

- **NHS Direct**

The online library of the NHS  
[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

This is a self-help booklet which covers a wide range of topics related to anxiety. It is split into 5 sections which each contain a lot of information. To gain the most benefit from this booklet, we would advise you to read one section at a time until you fully understand that section.

Some of these sections will be relevant to you, but there may also be parts which are not. There are various tasks throughout this booklet to help you identify your anxiety, and to help you learn new ways of dealing with it. These tasks are identified by '**Stop & Think**'. It is important to gain the most from this booklet to take some time to think about the questions asked, and to complete the tasks. It may be that it takes several readings of it before you start to write things down. That's ok, just take your time.

Don't worry if you are having difficulty with some of the ideas in the booklet. Just remember you are learning a new skill and it will take time and practise to learn to deal with your anxiety. Take your time, and praise yourself for every step you take. It can be helpful to get support from a friend or family member – so you may want to let them read this booklet.

Have a look at each section, then focus on the parts which seem most useful to you.

**If you would like this document in Braille or audio-tape format, please contact:**

**If you would like this document in another language, please contact:**

Ma tha sibh ag iarraidh an fhiosrachaidh seo ann an cànan eile, cuiribh fios gu:

如果您需要该信息的其它语言版本，请联系：

اگر این اطلاعات را به زبانی دیگر میخواهید لطفاً با این آدرس تماس بگیرید:

إذا رغبت في الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بـ:

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ:

اگر آپ یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو براہ مہربانی رابطہ کریں:

**Eğer bu bilgiyi bir başka dilde istiyorsanız lütfen bağlantı kurunuz:**

**Jeśli chcesz uzyskać te informacje w innym języku skontaktuj się z:**