



Understanding Anxiety



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Anxiety means feelings of unease, worry and fear. It usually relates to something that might happen, in the future, which is why WeThrive asks about feelings of anticipatory anxiety or foreboding. It's not just a state of mind - there are also unpleasant physical sensations.

The first thing to remember is that it is normal to feel anxious in some situations, and that it is part of the natural 'fight or flight' response that kicks in when we feel threatened. This releases hormones, including adrenalin and cortisol, which make you feel more alert, and increase your heart rate.

Historically this would have been useful for survival, but today it just makes it hard to think straight, which is one reason why it's a problem at work. It has other effects, too - it can disrupt sleep and digestion - some people stop eating because of this, while others comfort-eat when anxious.

Everyone becomes anxious sometime, it's one of our normal mechanisms for coping with the world. However, if the feeling is very strong, or continues over a long period, it can become hard to carry on with everyday life, or to contribute much at work. At this stage it may lead to a mental health diagnosis, and to having to take time off work.

Anxiety can also generalise so people worry all the time, about things that were previously not worrying or that are not even remotely likely to occur. And of course anxiety itself is a problem, so many people worry about the fact that they are worrying.

It seems that some people are born more cautious than others, and life events have their effect, but wherever you are on the anxiety spectrum there are things you can do to manage your feelings and retrain your mind and body to behave differently in the face of uncertainty.

The good news is that, with persistence and sometimes some help, almost everyone can have a significant effect on the degree of anxiety they experience. See the related resources on managing anxiety, relaxation and sleep for more help on changing your base level of anxiety.



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