Insight into anxiety

Information and support for residents for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

In partnership with the University of Cambridge
What causes anxiety?

Everyone feels anxious from time to time. Worrying about new or difficult situations, such as job interviews or an illness in the family, is normal. These feelings can be useful in the short term, helping people focus on tasks and giving them the motivation to deal with problems. However, for some people anxiety can be intense and continue for a long time. This may stop people from doing the things they want to and affect their quality of life.

Anxiety is a common problem that can be triggered by a number of factors. Research suggests that the tendency to become anxious may be inherited and some people learn to be anxious as a result of their upbringing.

Sometimes it is clear what is causing anxiety - it may be an event that occurred in the past or a current problem. Use of illicit drugs, poor diet and caffeine may also cause anxiety. However, in some people there is no obvious trigger and anxiety may be brought on by a combination of factors.

The good news is that with support the majority of people can control their anxiety.
What are the signs?

Anxiety affects people in many ways, both emotionally and physically. Anxiety can be rather general, or can take more specific forms.

Some of the more common of these are panic attacks, specific phobias, social phobia and obsessive compulsive disorders.

Common symptoms of general anxiety are:

- Disturbed sleep and tiredness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Expecting the worst in every situation
- Feels of paranoia
- Feeling irritable
- Dizziness or faintness
- Nausea and stomach upsets
- Sweating
- Chest pains
- Rapid or heavy breathing
- Irregular heartbeats

Panic attacks occur when some of the physical symptoms of anxiety build up rapidly, and they may be accompanied by fears that you will have a heart attack, pass out or lose control.
What next?

Self-help

Whether or not you are receiving medical treatment, it is important to try to help yourself. You may find it helpful to:

- Exercise
- Avoid drinking excessive alcohol or caffeine
- Learn relaxation and breathing techniques (you can get further information from your doctor or the agencies listed overleaf)
- Talk to other people. If you feel you cannot speak to those close to you, call a helpline or attend a self-help group.

Medication

Medication cannot cure anxiety in the long term but it can play a part in treatment. Tranquillisers can relieve the symptoms of anxiety but they have side effects and can become addictive after four weeks. Anti-depressants can also help and are not addictive but, like other medicines, may cause unwanted side effects.

If you have any questions or concerns about your medication, it is important that you discuss these with your pharmacist or doctor.
**Psychological treatments**

These involve talking and listening and can take place individually or in groups. Research suggests that the most effective of these is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), which helps to control symptoms by looking at the way people think and behave when anxious. Most self-help treatments are based on this approach. You can ask your doctor for psychological treatments regardless of medication or other treatments.

Some doctors have access to these within their surgery or health centre. Psychological treatments are free in the NHS but may not be available locally and there may be a waiting list. Your doctor may refer you to a voluntary organisation or you can approach one yourself. Psychological treatments can be hard work but many who persevere feel the benefits.

**Complementary or alternative therapies**

These cover a range of treatments, including yoga and homeopathy. Some people find these help them to relax, but alone they may alleviate the symptoms of anxiety.

It is important that you discuss complementary treatments with your doctor and let him/her know if you are using any and the results.
Other sources of information

Local self-help / voluntary organisations

Age Concern Mental Health Advocacy Service
T 01353 669964

Bowthorpe Centre (Wisbech):
T 01945 582840

Cambridgeshire Independent Advocacy Service:

Huntingdonshire - 01480 454777
Fenland - 01354 652445
Peterborough - 01733 758278
Cambridge - 01223 218500

Hunts Mind
T 01480 415371

Lifecraft
T 01223 566957

Peterborough and Fenland MIND
T 01733 758211

Support for carers

Age Concern Carer Support Worker
T 01480 218643

Hilltop Day and Carers' Centre
T 01223 712055

Huntingdon Carers' Support Project:
T 01480 415141

Rethink Peterborough Carer Support Services:
T 01733 843344

Making Space - Cambridgeshire Carer Support Services
T 0773 8148277

Young Carers' Projects:
Peterborough - 01733 342683 / 311016
Huntingdon - 0845 241 2145
Fenland - 01945 475440
South Cambs - 01223 712072
Telephone helplines

Lifeline (evening mental health helpline)
T 01223 521521 - 7pm-11pm - 365 days

NHS Direct (for confidential health information and advice)
T 0845 4647 - 24 hours - 365 days

Websites
www.cpft.nhs.uk (information about mental health and services provided by CPFT)

www.mentalhealth.huntsmind.org.uk (information about other mental health services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough)

For further information about Trust services or to raise an issue, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0800 376 0775 or pals@cpft.nhs.uk

This leaflet was produced by people with personal experience of anxiety and organisations that can support them. It is one of a range of leaflets in the Insight series.