

COPING WITH ANXIETY AND STRESS

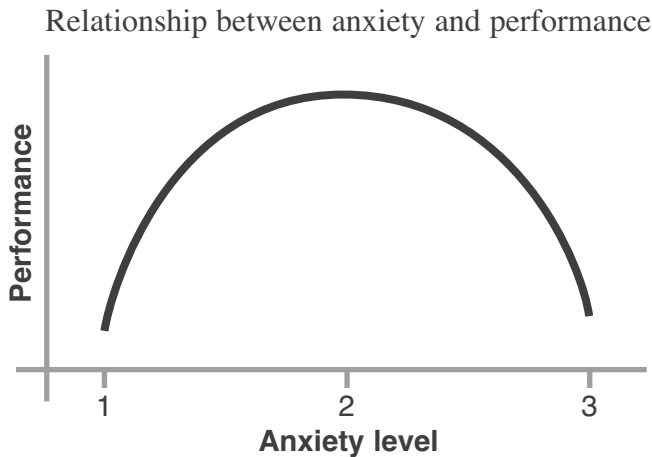
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UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND ANXIETY

Some Stress and Anxiety is Normal and Necessary

A certain amount of anxiety and stress is normal and necessary to perform any task properly. For example it is unlikely that we will cross a road safely if we aren't slightly anxious about the traffic. However too much or too little anxiety will always make us less effective in what we are doing. This information is simplified in the following graph.



The three different levels of anxiety shown each will have a different affect on our performance. This can be applied to any task, from playing tennis, taking exams, or working. If anxiety is too low or too high then our performance will be made worse, but between these extremes lies a level of anxiety that enables us to perform at our best.

Our Individual Capacity to Cope with Stress

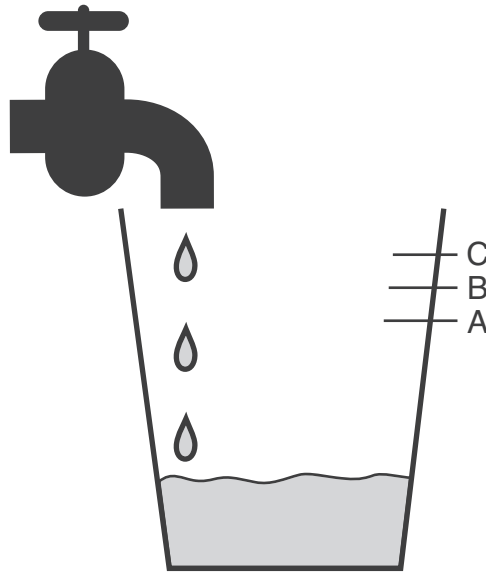
Despite the fact that some anxiety is normal and necessary to perform any task, it is usually the case that problems arise because levels of stress have become too high. Regardless of who we are or what we do all of us have a limit to the amount of stress that we can cope with.

The simplest way to think about this limit is to imagine that you have a glass inside your body which represents your capacity for stress. Since all of us have a different capacity for stress everybody's glass is different. We can think about stress a rather like a tap that is constantly hovering over our glass dripping in stress. When we are calm and relaxed the tap is virtually turned off, the more stress that we are under the more the tap drips. Our stress taps are just as personal to us as our stress glass. What turns on the tap for one person may not necessarily be a stress for somebody else.

Symptoms as Signals

As the level of stress rises in the glass it becomes increasingly likely that our bodies will begin to produce symptoms in order to signal to us that the level is getting too high. These signals are designed to make us do something about the stress level. The actual symptoms that we experience will depend upon our own make up, no two people's responses to stress will be exactly the same. The point at which we experience these signals will of course depend upon the rate of flow of stress and the size and shape of our stress glass, that is, it will depend upon our own unique make up.

Gradually as the stress levels rise they will eventually reach a level where the body begins to warn us that we are under too much stress. In the diagram over this is shown as point A. It is here that we first start to get unpleasant symptoms which are difficult to ignore. Some of the more common symptoms include: Headaches, chest pains, sleep problems, changes in mood, nausea, feelings of unreality, tiredness, sexual problems, increase in worrying, irritability and anger, increased use of the toilet, etc.



It is very important that we all learn how our own bodies respond to stress. Then we will be able to respond to the signal early on and do something to prevent the stress levels from continuing to go up. In many ways we can also count ourselves lucky that our bodies respond to stress with these particular warning signals. Some less fortunate people develop other symptoms such as ulcers, increased blood pressure, and heart disease.

If the signal is ignored at point A, that is, the person does nothing to reduce their stress, then the tap will keep dripping and continue to fill the glass to point B. Here the original symptoms may get more severe or a new symptom may develop to provide another signal of the need for action. Again, if this is also ignored, the level will continue to go on rising to point C and so on. In this way someone suffering from long term stress may have experienced several different symptoms before they eventually seek help.

Our stress taps can cause the glass to fill up for lots of reasons. It may have occurred very slowly over a number of years where stress has been continuous. Common situations like this include work which is over

demanding, family members have been chronically ill, financial problems have built up, or the children have been going through a difficult phase. Under these circumstances people often describe their stress symptoms starting 'out of the blue'. They say 'nothing has changed, I've been living like this for some time'. This may be true but now the stress has caught up with them. The final few drops of stress over the last few weeks on top of all the other stress which has accumulated over years have now brought the level to point A.

Other events can cause our stress taps to turn on much more quickly. Here the glass fills rapidly and symptoms can come on very quickly. This might occur for instance in a car accident, on hearing very upsetting news, or when having to face things that we are most afraid of. At such times it is usually easier to understand our why stress reactions occurred, though these may still be very unpleasant.

It is very important to remember that our signals of stress are not simply based on the stresses of the moment. Obviously if your stress glass has been full for a long time it won't take much to start the symptom signals. If the glass is relatively empty then we can cope with much more.

Panic Attacks are One type of Stress Signal

One of the most frightening of all of the possible symptoms signals of stress is the combination of physical symptoms experienced in a panic attack. Their onset is very rapid and sudden, with little or no warning. Panic attacks are very common with approximately 1 in 10 adults having had them. For those that do their frequency can vary from once yearly, to many times a day.

For anyone who has never had a panic attack it may be difficult to fully understand what the sufferer goes through, but it may help to get an idea from the following scene. Imagine that you are shopping at your local supermarket. You are happily filling your trolley with the week's groceries when you turn the corner into the next aisle and suddenly you see a roaring lion, open mouthed with glistening teeth, heading straight for you.

Of course you'd be panic stricken; your heart would be beating wildly, you'd sweat profusely, shake, feel faint, and without further thought you'd be running away as fast as you could.

Now imagine turning into the same aisle in the supermarket, all those same bodily reactions start and yet there's nothing there - no lion, nothing. Your heart is beating frantically, you feel faint and dizzy, sweating, shaking, wanting to run away and yet there's nothing there to be afraid of. What would you think? 'I'm going mad...I'm having a heart attack....I'm dying.....I'm going to be sick or faint.....I'm going to make a fool of myself'. Most of us would probably have these terrifying thoughts, run out of the situation and call our doctors. This is often exactly what the panic attack victim does when they have no idea what is happening to them.

Unfortunately it is exactly these thoughts and actions which make our panic attacks worse. We become terrified of having another and we begin to avoid every possible situation where it might happen again. The more we anticipate having another panic attack the more likely it is to happen.

Understanding a Panic Attack - The Fight or Flight Response

Everybody has probably at some time or another in their lives experienced the 'fight or flight' response, also called the 'alarm reaction'. Imagine the physical feelings associated with being high up a ladder and feeling it slipping, or being in a 'near miss' in a car. These feelings are the bodies natural response to prepare us to cope with danger or sudden threat. This response is entirely automatic, we don't need to think about it to make it happen.

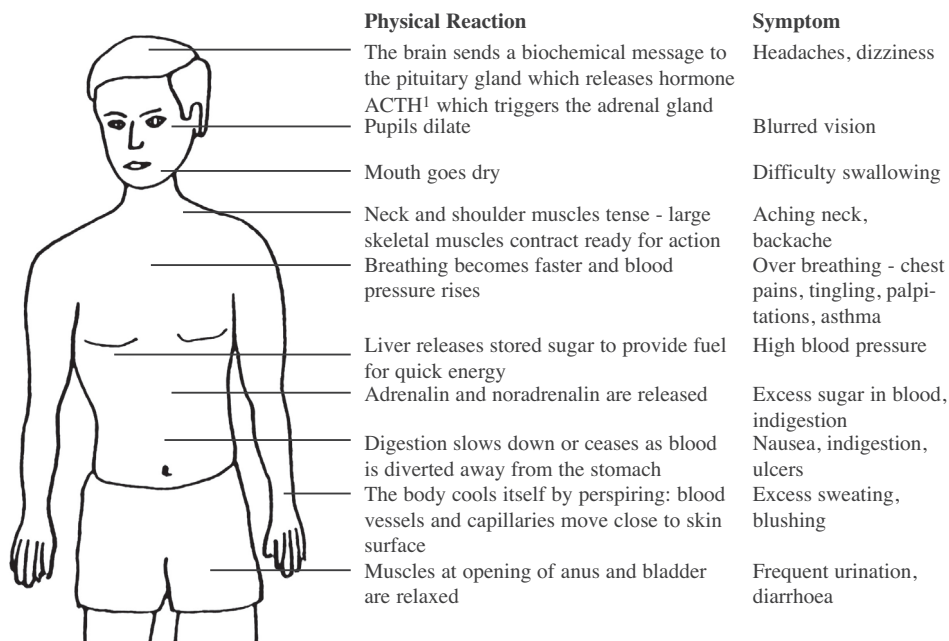
In order to understand the importance of the fight or flight response. it is useful to think back many thousands of years to the times when human beings lived as cavemen. Imagine the following scene: A caveman leaves his cave one day setting out to hunt for food. On his travels he comes to a large bush behind which he hears rustling and sudden movement, obviously that of an animal. Immediately the caveman must be prepared for one of two possibilities; first, it may be a rabbit or other small animal

making the noise. In that case the caveman would have to be very alert to dive into the bush or run after the animal to catch it and kill it for food. Second, the rustling may be that of a lion or another dangerous animal. Now the caveman must be prepared either to run away or defend himself from attack.

In both circumstances we can see that the caveman must be ready for 'fight' and/or 'flight'. This bodily preparation must occur instantaneously, the caveman doesn't have time to think carefully about the situation. A reflex reaction is immediately set into motion. The brain signals the adrenal gland to release the hormone adrenaline into the blood stream. This chemical causes very rapid changes to take place in the caveman's body. These changes are exactly the same as those experienced during a panic attack:

- Our heart is beating very hard to pump more blood to the muscles in our arms and legs for running and fighting.
- Our breathing rate increases to take in more oxygen for the blood and muscles
- We often sweat profusely so as to cool the body down
- We can feel faint, dizzy and sick because blood from the head and chest is being pumped to the arms and legs for fighting and running.
- We sometimes feel the need to rush to the toilet.

All of these bodily changes are shown in the following diagram. They happen very suddenly and the experience can be very frightening if we have no understanding of what is going on.



Note: ¹ACTH - adrenocorticotrophic hormone

A Panic Attack Will Not and Cannot Harm You

However frightening a panic attack may be we must always remember one thing, none of the symptoms of a panic attack can cause us any harm. People often worry that their heart is beating so fast that they'll have a panic attack, or they feel so faint and dizzy they think they'll faint or be sick in public, or make a complete fool of themselves. People become so afraid of these imagined consequences that they avoid those situations where they believe it could happen. Now we are no longer avoiding the situation but the fear response itself. As we avoid more and more situations we slowly restrict our lives and become prisoners of our own anxiety.

We must constantly remind ourselves that a panic attack has its basis in the alarm, 'fight and flight' mechanism which has kept the species of man alive in dangerous situations for thousands of years. If the mechanism could

cause us to faint, or vomit , or go mad, or have a heart attack, then we would have made very easy prey every time we encountered dangerous situations. Mankind would have died out long ago if this was the case. But it is not. A panic attack will not and cannot harm you.

Hyperventilation and Anxiety Symptoms

Although a panic attack will never cause us to faint we must be careful not to over breathe during a panic attack which could under rare circumstances bring us close to fainting. Breathing more heavily is a natural response when our heart rate goes up, so it's not uncommon that people breathe quicker during panic. Hyperventilation is one type of rapid breathing that needs to be controlled during a panic attack. It has been suggested that 70% of those who have panic attacks may also be hyperventilating.

Hyperventilation is rapid, shallow breathing from the chest rather than from the stomach. It causes large amount of oxygen to be taken in to the lungs which in turn means that the heart must beat even faster to cope with this. Changes in the balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the lungs can take place and in the longer term, this can alter the acidity of the blood. This in turn can also cause more chronic symptoms of stress including chest pains, headaches etc.

Eventually, if this rapid breathing continues, the body can cut off this excessive supply of oxygen by causing us to faint. When we faint we return to normal patterns of breathing and so fainting is a 'fail-safe' way of controlling hyperventilation. If we are prone to over-breathing during panic we must practice breathing more slowly and deeply in through the nose and out through the mouth. It is virtually impossible to hyperventilate through the nose. This is discussed in more detail later.

Catastrophic Thinking and Anxiety

Thinking catastrophically, both by misinterpreting bodily symptoms and anticipating disaster, plays a major role in the development of anxiety

symptoms and in making them worse. There are generally four types of 'panic thoughts':

Thoughts of anticipation. These put us in the mood to feel anxious. People with social anxiety will think that; 'there will be nobody at the party to talk to'. Those who fear lifts will assume; 'the lift will get stuck'. A person who has had panic attacks in supermarkets will think about what happened last time and imagine the same outcome on reaching for the shopping bag.

Can't cope thoughts. These thoughts are related to both the situation and the symptoms. Typical of these are: 'I can't bear this, this is so awful', 'I'll never be able to do that', 'Everyone will see how anxious I am'. Such thoughts reduce our self confidence and encourage us to give up before we even try.

Thoughts misinterpreting bodily symptoms. These thoughts stem from a misunderstanding of our physical sensations during anxiety attacks. They include: 'I'm having a heart attack', 'I'm going to pass out', 'I'm dying or going mad'. These thoughts are based on the assumption that there must be something badly wrong with the body to cause the symptoms that they are experiencing.

Escape thoughts. These lead to avoidance and include: 'I'll be OK once I get home', 'I must get out of this situation', 'I'll be safe if I run away'. When people act on these thoughts their anxiety does go down in the short term and so the thoughts and act of avoiding are rewarded and become strengthened. This leads to quicker avoidance next time. However, the anxiety is still there.

A Summary - The Acute Anxiety Spiral

Anxiety symptoms are caused by a sudden or gradual build up of stress. Our tap turns on, either suddenly or slowly, and our stress glass begins to fill. As the stress level rises and eventually reaches the person's upper limit, certain physical symptoms will occur to signal stress. This signal is our body's way of warning us to start to do something to reduce our stress

levels. This usually means learning to change the way we live and the way we think.

One common symptom of stress is a panic attack. Here adrenaline is released into the blood stream and an acute anxiety spiral can then start.. The first stage is the awareness of the initial bodily changes as a result of the adrenaline. These sensations are the first acute symptoms of anxiety often leading to hyperventilation and catastrophic panic thoughts. The second stage is an awareness of not only the situation we are afraid of, but also of the fact that we are beginning to panic. This leads to a greater surge of anxiety. We become afraid of our own fear. The third stage is a recognition that the symptoms are getting worse and an assumption that they will go on increasing. These panic thoughts lead to the further release of adrenaline and then finally to the person running away from the situation.

OVERCOMING YOUR ANXIETY AND STRESS PROBLEMS

Facing the Fear

Having understood what is happening when we feel anxiety symptoms, the next stage is overcoming patterns of avoidance, changing stressful lifestyles, and regaining our self confidence. In order to do this we must first draw up a list of all of the things that we have been avoiding or which we currently find difficult to achieve. This list will contain the tasks and activities you took for granted as normal before your problems started. This will obviously be easier if there are specific phobic problems but, people with more generalised anxiety and stress will often be avoiding things too.

A typical list of difficulties may be as follows:

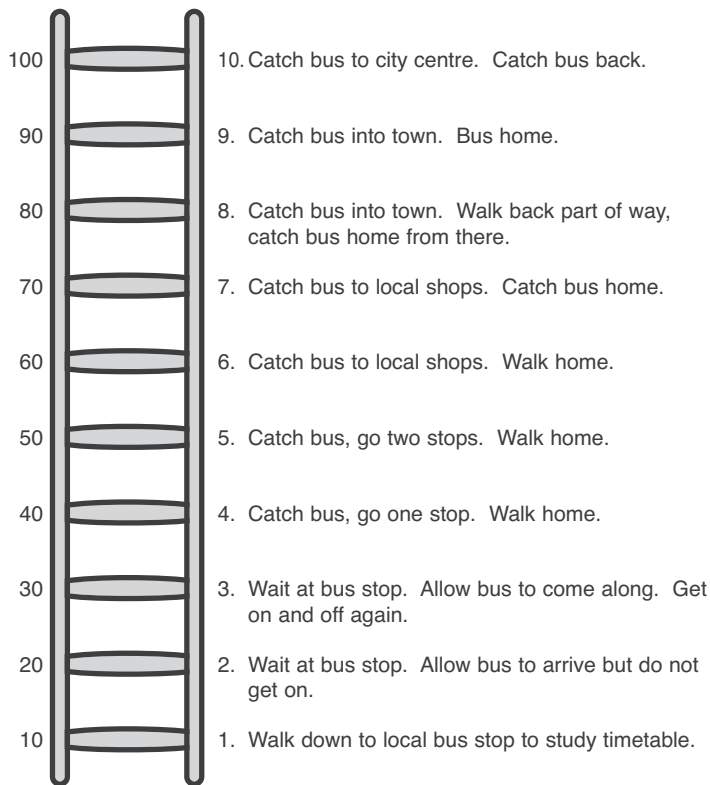
1. Avoiding public transport i.e. Buses, trains, and tubes.
2. Letting people take advantage of you.
3. Avoiding being assertive with the boss.
4. Constantly saying no to social invitations.
5. Not making time for exercise, hobbies and interests.
6. Working too many hours, taking on too much.

Developing a Strategy

The next stage is to put these problems into order. Which are the most pressing problems that need to be addressed first? Once we have established this, perhaps through discussion with others, we must begin to break the problem down into specific targets or stages. It is very unlikely that any of the above problems can be overcome overnight. Rather, by gradually achieving smaller targets which address part of the problem we will eventually master the whole thing.

This could be likened to climbing up the rungs of a ladder. No one can get to the top of a ladder without starting at the bottom. Each rung represents progress toward the final destination. We don't move on up until we feel safe at the previous stage. The same is true of overcoming anxiety. We must first breakdown each problem into a series of manageable stages. Lets us look for instance at the problem with public transport.

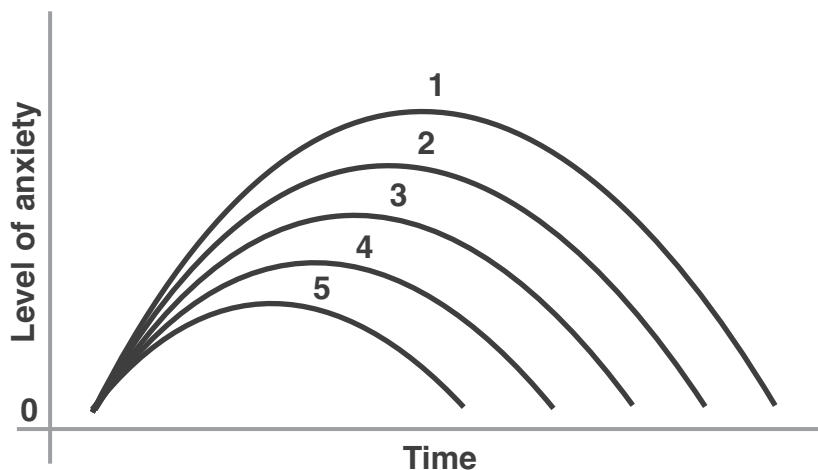
We might initially focus solely on buses and construct a series of stages of increasing difficulty with this task as follows:



This ladder therefore represents part of a 'hierarchy of fear' of public transport. The items lower on the ladder are those which we can do currently with relatively less anxiety and higher up those which we will want to do but at the moment find more difficult. Starting at the bottom we must then systematically face up to the fear situation. Just like climbing a ladder it is important not to continue on up until you are comfortable with the stage you are at. Therefore each task is attempted several times in order to regain full confidence. It is useful if you can monitor your progress and thereby record your improvement using a method of record keeping similar to the following table.

Target	Date/Time	How did it go?	Rate anxiety 1-100
1. Walk to local bus-stop to study time-table.	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
2. Wait at bus-stop. Allow bus to arrive. Don't get on.	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
3. Wait at bus-stop. Get on and off again.	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
4. Catch bus, go one stop then walk home.	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
5. Catch bus, go two stops then walk home.	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		

Gradually the more you face up to the specific target the easier it gets. The initial anxiety becomes less and less and so does the time that the anxiety lasts for. This can be shown by the following graphs of a persons anxiety levels facing the first target five times:



If you find that the anxiety fails to reduce or your having problems facing the feared situation it is possible that the rungs on your ladder are too far apart. Try to think of a target that would be a little easier and fit this in between.

This general principle of overcoming fear and problems gradually is applicable to each of the areas of difficulty listed. Setting daily targets and working with a number of these from different hierarchies at the same time will quickly lead to greater self confidence and feelings of being back in control.

SELF HELP SKILLS

Managing anxiety is about learning to turn off your stress tap and frequently drain your stress glass. In this way the level of your stress will rarely reach the threshold for stress and anxiety symptoms. The following section deals with some practical ways of achieving this.

Controlling Hyperventilation

There are two aspects to controlling hyperventilation: First, stopping the rapid, shallow over breathing from the mouth. Second, to correct the levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs. You must learn to become more aware of your patterns of breathing. Look out for the early warning signals of hyperventilation like feelings of tightness in the chest, feelings of being stifled, and difficulty getting a 'proper breath'. If you notice that you are over-breathing follow these simple steps:

1. Stop whatever you are doing and find a quiet place to sit down
2. Close your eyes and focus on the word 'CALM'.
3. Try to release any tension in your upper body. Drop your shoulders in a sideways widening direction. Straighten your back to take any pressure off your stomach.
4. Breathe slowly in through your nose to a count of four and then out through the mouth again to a count of four slowly.
5. Try to be aware of breathing deeply into your stomach not your chest.

In order to deal with any imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs it will be necessary to get hold of a paper bag (not plastic). Place this over the nose and mouth so that you can then re breathe the air that you've just breathed out. This method allows us to gradually replace the carbon dioxide that was blown off during hyperventilation. Repeat this process for five breaths, counting slowly to four, in and out. Repeat this procedure three or four times a day if you think that you may have been prone to hyperventilation for some time.

Relaxation methods

Relaxation is incompatible with feeling anxious, you can't feel both at once. This is because relaxation is controlled by the parasympathetic nervous system which works in opposition to the sympathetic nervous system which causes anxiety. Therefore if you can learn a method of

relaxation and use this regularly you will be able to control anxiety more effectively.

There are many forms of relaxation including yoga, meditation, using imagery, hypnosis etc. The method favoured by most clinical psychologists is called 'progressive muscular relaxation'. This involves a series of tensing and relaxing exercises throughout the muscles of the body.

When we tense the muscles of the hand for instance, by making a fist two important changes take place. First, the muscles become hard and tighten around the bones of the hand. Second, the brain is signalled that the muscles of the hand need oxygenated blood to enable them to be used effectively. When this exercise is stopped suddenly these processes reverse. As the blood withdraws a slight tingling effect is felt, and the muscles become loose and relaxed now hanging on the bones of the hand as though dead weight. This creates a sensation of warm heaviness. As each exercise is conducted for all of the muscles of the body, so the feelings of heaviness spread until the whole body feels calm and pleasantly relaxed.

Each exercise of tensing is held for approximately 5 seconds. The body area is then allowed to immediately relax by letting go of the tensing exercise and the relaxation continues for 10 seconds before the next exercise. Each body area is tensed twice before moving on. The sequence of exercises and the methods of tensing used are as follows;

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. Right hand | Squeeze the right hand tightly into a fist. |
| 2. Right forearm | Straighten the right arm and bend down the hand as far as you can. |
| 3. Right biceps | Force the knuckles of right hand onto the right shoulder. |
| 4. Left hand | Squeeze the left hand tightly into a fist. |
| 5. Left forearm | Straighten the left arm and bend down the hand as far as you can. |

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 6. Left biceps | Force the knuckles of left hand onto the left shoulder. |
| 7. Forehead | Raise up the eyebrows or frown hard. |
| 8. Eyes | Screw up the eyes tightly. |
| 9. Mouth, cheek, jaw | Clench teeth and stretch the mouth as though in an exaggerated smile. |
| 10. Neck | Gently force the head back, or force the chin onto the chest. |
| 11. Shoulders | Force shoulders back, or forward. |
| 12. Chest | Take in a deep breath and force the chest to expand. |
| 13. Stomach | Suck the stomach in under the rib cage |
| 14. Right thigh | Straighten the right leg. |
| 15. Right calf | Point up your right toes towards your face. |
| 16. Right foot | Curl down your right toes and bend down your right foot. |
| 17. Left thigh | Straighten the left leg. |
| 18. Left calf | Point up your left toes towards your face. |
| 19. Left foot | Curl down your left toes and bend down your left foot. |

It is also helpful to think the word 'calm' in your mind each time you breathe out for a few minutes, both at the beginning and the end of the exercises. In this way the word will become associated with feelings of relaxation. This word can then also act as a powerful method of distraction, closing your eyes and thinking the word 'calm', if you begin to feel anxious.

Relaxation is a skill it must be practised initially daily for a month and then as required. It can be performed sitting or lying down, in a quiet room with dim lighting where you won't be disturbed.

Physical Exercise

Studies have shown that aerobic physical exercise is a very important strategy for reducing muscle tension, relieving frustrations and generally making us more healthy and improving self esteem. Under states of high stress we should be thinking about a daily half hour of this type of vigorous exercise which significantly increases our heart rate. It is helpful if you can vary the type of exercise taken to be using different muscles, but most importantly the exercise must be vigorous. Examples include; jogging; cycling; swimming; squash; badmington; exercise classes; gym workouts etc.

It is often useful to conduct exercise with a partner, a group, or in a club. This can help to motivate us when we don't feel like doing it. People often report feeling too tired to do exercise. This tiredness can occur in people with stress and anxiety problems as a result of chronic muscles tension. Here the muscles are in constant use, as though you have been running up and down on the spot all day. Vigorous physical exercise will help to reduce this tension and thereby give you more energy.

Once you begin to commit yourself to this form of activity the rewards will quickly become apparent. Exercise has also been shown to raise mood levels by altering the chemicals in our brains, making us generally feel more positive.

Distraction techniques

Learning to distract yourself from focusing on anxiety symptoms or particular worrying thoughts will assist in turning off the stress tap. There are many methods of distraction and we must discover, through practise, which method works best for us. The following are some of the most common methods:

1. Thought Stopping

One variation of this method involves speaking out loud the particular worrying thought or obsessive idea. At some random point during this speech a friend is asked to shout 'STOP' very loudly. The fright that this causes automatically interrupts the train of thought which is therefore stopped. The next stage in this process is the person themselves interrupting their train of thought with the word 'STOP' again initially aloud. The method then shifts from speaking the thoughts to thinking them and thinking the word 'STOP'. Try to imagine the word just as loud and shocking. With practice imagining the word STOP can be a very effective way of blocking continuous worries.

2. Mild Pain

Pain is the most powerful message that the brain receives and this can override all other information. Therefore, if we are trying to distract ourselves from thinking about a particular symptom, we can focus our attention on another bodily area by say digging our fingernails into the palm of the hand , or gently biting our lip. Obviously it is important not to overdo this! Even mild pain can be a very effective distracter. Another method involves placing an elastic band on the wrist and gently twanging this to distract us from a particularly unwelcome thought.

3. Meditation Mantras

Select any word or phrase for example 'calm', or 'my body and mind are relaxed'. Close your eyes and repeat this over and over again in your mind. You will find with practice that you are able to block out all other thoughts using this simple method and can achieve a deep level of relaxation. Practice this daily for fifteen minutes until you can do it anytime, anywhere.

4. Environmental Focus

This refers to looking out for, and concentrating on, specific details of the world around on which to focus your attention in difficult situations. In a supermarket you might focus on the prices of all red items. In the car you might try to make words out of the number plate letters on cars that go by, or at a party you might focus on how many people have bitten nails. In this way focusing externally helps to prevent us focusing on our own anxious thoughts or bodily symptoms.

5. Using a Bridging Object

A bridging object is one which transports you from the here and now to specific happy memories from the past. An example might be a family photo, a ribbon from a bouquet, or a small souvenir from a holiday. Carry the item with you and take it out and look at it to focus your thoughts on these memories as a way of relaxing you and lifting your spirits.

6. Mental Games

Try to think of a girls name for every letter of the alphabet, or a kitchen item, or animal etc. This task can be played with companions and could occupy your mind on a difficult journey in the car, or on the bus. Puzzle books and crosswords can also help to focus the mind as long as they are not too difficult.

7. Behavioural Activity

Keeping busy is another important method of distraction. Having too much time on our hands allows the mind to wander onto unhelpful thoughts which may lead to more anxiety. Try to plan tomorrow's activities the day before, so that as soon as you get up your busy.

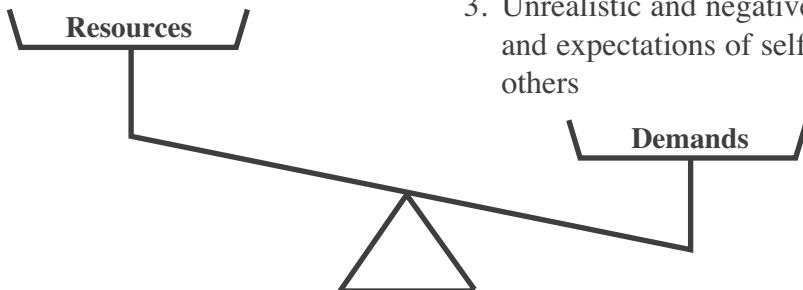
Changing Lifestyles

Try to always remember that the symptoms of anxiety and stress have occurred for a reason. It is very important to try to think what has caused our stress taps to turn on and fill our stress glasses. Very often part of the reason has to do with the way we live our lives. This can include many aspects of life: overworking, not getting enough time for hobbies and pleasurable events, being too passive and aimless in life, taking on too many responsibilities, not eating a balanced diet, not getting enough sleep, drinking too much, always rushing around. These sort of activities are very common in people who have stress problems.

It may be useful to relate how we cope with the stresses of life to a set of scales. On one side of the balance we have our resources for coping on the other side are the demands themselves. If demands outweigh resources then stress and anxiety symptoms will inevitably result.

1. Physical health
2. Skills and experience
3. Emotional make-up / personality
4. Social support
5. Opportunities for pleasure/relaxation
6. Positive and realistic attitudes and expectations

1. Demands of life: emotional, physical, financial, social
2. Adjustment to change: work, illness, unemployment, marriage
3. Unrealistic and negative attitudes and expectations of self and others



Changing Attitudes

It has been suggested by some psychologists that life is not itself stressful. Rather it is the views and opinions that we hold about life which can cause us stress. There are always a number of ways at looking at any particular event. Each of these different viewpoints is likely to bring about a different response to that event.

For example let us take the event of a boy's girlfriend telephoning to say that she doesn't want to see him any more. He could think 'that's awful, terrible, disastrous. I'll never find another girlfriend, I'm doomed to a life on my own'. Alternatively he might take the view 'We weren't getting on too well really, perhaps she's right we weren't suited. Never mind I'll find someone else'. These two different responses will obviously lead to two quite different emotional reactions. On the one hand depression and hopelessness on the other slight sadness but with some optimism. The event was the same, only the thinking differed.

Often when we feel anxious or under stress it has a lot to do with the way we are thinking. We may be overestimating the chances of a feared event occurring, or overstating how severe this event could be. We may be underestimating our own ability to cope, or assuming that no one would be there to lend a hand. In other circumstances people who experience stress are often thinking in very black and white terms constantly using words like 'must', 'have to', 'should', and 'ought'. With this type of thinking we can become imprisoned by an inflexible view of life. This will inevitably leads to further stress.

It is important to learn to monitor and police our thoughts more carefully. Often when we feel wound up or upset it is related to our distorted thinking. Learn to challenge irrational thinking by writing the thoughts down on one side of a piece of paper and writing a thought or thoughts which challenge the irrational idea with another way of looking at the situation. In time this method will become more automatic and irrational unhelpful thoughts will diminish. Here are some examples of this process:

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

I'll never beat this anxiety.

Just take one day at a time. There's a lot of things that I can do to help myself.

I may have a panic attack and faint.

I've never fainted before. If I control my breathing I'll be fine.

I can't face my boss, she's so critical.

Avoiding situations just makes things worse. I must speak up for myself and let her know how I feel.

IN SUMMARY

Try to remember and rehearse the following points:

Generally:

- Learn to recognise what turns on your stress tap and change what you can to reduce the flow.
- Remember to try drain your stress glass regularly with exercise, relaxation, and pleasant and interesting events.

During panic:

- Remind yourself that anxiety symptoms cannot hurt or harm you
- Breathe through the nose and sit down if you can. The panic will soon pass
- Think calmly and rationally about what is happening don't talk yourself into more panic
- Use distraction to focus away from symptoms and worrying thoughts

Helping yourself:

- Face your fears systematically progressing a day at a time.
- Develop your relaxation and distraction skills through regular practice.
- Learn to challenge irrational and negative patterns of thinking
- Examine your lifestyle and be prepared to change it where necessary.

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