

Anxiety: Plain English

- Anxiety is more intense than just feeling worried.
- Anxiety is a natural response to feeling unsafe and can help protect us from danger.
- If feelings are strong, come out of nowhere or don't seem to go away it can become a mental health issue.
- Everyone experiences anxiety differently and we can't control how it will affect us. Some people feel more sad or more worried and some may feel both.

Why do people develop anxiety?

- There is no single cause. Anxiety can be from a combination of genetics; brain; environment; culture; and life experience.
- Part of what makes us anxious is a process in the body called "Fight or Flight". If we don't feel safe our body speeds up our heart rate and breathing and makes our muscles tense. This gets us ready to fight or run away from danger.
- These feelings can be overwhelming and confusing when they happen and there is no danger, just in everyday life. If people have these anxious feelings even when in a safe environment it can become a mental health issue.

What does anxiety feel like?

- Worrying or Difficulty controlling worry: Strong worry even over small things. It can be very hard to stop worrying or to calm down. Anxiety can cause worry about health, loved ones or something happening in the world and can only focus on the most negative perspective.
- Fear of change: Because it is linked to safety, anxiety can make us scared of new people, new places and new situations. It is normal to feel a little nervous about new things, but if this feeling is so strong it becomes overwhelming it can create problems.
- Avoidance: People may avoid places, people or activities that make them anxious. This means people can miss out on things they might really enjoy and become more isolated.
- Physical symptoms: Anxiety isn't just in our thoughts. Anxiety can give us feelings in our body like a fast heart beat; hard to breathe; tight throat; sweaty hands; sick feeling in stomach; tense muscles; shaky on feet/weak feeling; headaches; hard to sleep; increase or decrease of appetite.
- Some or all of the above happening very strongly is called a Panic Attack. These can pass quickly or last a long time and are common for people with anxiety.