



# Understanding anxiety

## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is something that we all experience from time to time. It's our body's way of preparing us to face challenging situations. Sometimes anxiety can help us perform better by helping us feel alert and motivated.

Anxiety can come and go – but for some people, it can stick around for a long time, or occur in situations where you wouldn't normally expect to feel anxious. This can end up having a big impact on their daily lives. When this happens, it might be time to do something about it.

## Types of anxiety

Anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worries or fears. People can experience different types of anxiety disorders, but it's important to know that they can all be treated.

Some people may worry, and feel their worries are out of control about many areas of life (i.e., work, studies, health). They might feel tense and nervous most of the time, have trouble sleeping or find it hard to concentrate.

Some people may experience intense anxiety in social situations because of fear of embarrassment or judgement. This may lead to avoiding situations where there are other people.

## Signs & symptoms

Everyone experiences anxiety differently, but there are some common signs and symptoms.

### Physical signs can include:



- racing heart
- faster breathing
- feeling tense or having aches (especially neck, shoulders & back)
- sweating or feeling dizzy
- shaking
- 'butterflies' or feeling sick in the stomach

### Thoughts can include:



- worrying about things a lot of the time
- feeling like your worries are out of control
- having trouble concentrating & paying attention
- worries that seem out of proportion

### Other signs can include:



- being unable to relax
- avoiding people or places
- withdrawing from family and friends
- feeling annoyed, irritated or restless
- difficulty getting to sleep at night or waking up a lot during the night

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## How you can manage anxiety

There are things you can try to help manage your anxiety so that it doesn't get in the way of your daily life. These include:

**Care for yourself** Managing anxiety starts with good self-care. Try to eat well, get enough sleep and stay active to help your overall mental health and wellbeing.

**Talk about it** It's a good idea to talk about how you're feeling – whether it's with a trusted family member, friends, your mob or Elders, or a counsellor. They can support you, help you understand what's going on, help you stick to your self-care goals and get extra help if needed.

**Notice your thinking patterns** Being aware of how your thoughts can influence your anxiety is an important step towards managing it. It can help you understand what contributes to your anxiety and what your triggers are. This can help you to handle them differently and learn new ways to respond.

**Be aware of avoidance** It's normal to want to avoid situations that make you feel anxious. It might work in the short-term, but over time it can make your anxiety feel worse.

Learn some skills to cope with anxiety, like helpful self-talk and relaxation, then gradually face the things you fear and put your skills into action. As you realise you can manage anxious situations, you'll become more confident and motivated to keep going.

**Try new breathing strategies** Lots of anxiety symptoms involve a cycle of physical sensations – pounding heart, shortness of breath, trembling and butterflies in the stomach. Working on slowing your breathing is a good way to try to interrupt that cycle. There are many apps that can help with this.

Here are two simple techniques that may help.

### Belly breathing



**STEP 1:** Put your hand on your belly.

**STEP 2:** Breathe in and expand your belly like a balloon.

**STEP 3:** Breathe out nice and slowly. Feel your belly go down.

**STEP 4:** Repeat at least 4 times. Or as many as you like!

### 5 finger breathing



Limit your use of alcohol and other drugs

While alcohol and other drugs might help you to feel good in the short term, they can make you feel much worse in the longer term.

## Getting Support

There are plenty of ways to manage your anxiety so that it doesn't get in the way of your daily life. Check out the **Rural Aid Mental Health & Wellbeing** website for tips on how to look after your mental health and to learn more about anxiety.

If you've tried some of these strategies for some time without improving despite your efforts, it's time to reach out. You can get in contact with **Rural Aid's Mental Health & Wellbeing** team by calling **1300 327 624**

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming or intense emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately or call **000** or speak to someone at **Lifeline (13 11 14)**.