MINDFUL MOMENTS

BY FUSION

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health is something we are all aware of and is increasingly talked about in the workplace as well as in our personal lives, however, a survey undertaken early in 2024 revealed that half (51%) the UK population believes that there is still a great deal of shame associated with mental health conditions. While people believe that the level of stigma around mental illness has decreased over the last five years, over half (56%) of respondents experiencing mental ill health still feel ashamed.

"It's okay not to be okay" is one of the most well-used lines in mental health campaigning, but for many experiencing mental illness this does not always ring true. It is important that the public mean what they say when they say, "It's okay not to be okay". People need to challenge shame and discrimination for those living with a mental health diagnosis.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal emotion in us all, but sometimes it can get out of control and become a mental health problem. Lots of things can lead to feelings of anxiety, including exam pressures, relationships, starting a new job (or losing one), feeling under pressure to perform at work or other big life events. We can also get anxious when it comes to things to do with money and not being able to meet our basic needs, like heating our home or buying food. There are lots of things which you can do to help manage feelings of anxiety, and what works will be different for everyone. Here are nine evidence-based things you can try to help manage feelings of anxiety.

1. FOCUS ON YOUR BREATHING

When you're having anxious thoughts try focusing on your breathing, concentrating on the feeling of your body as you breathe in and out. It can help you control the thought.

4-7-8 BREATHING TECHNIQUE

Close your mouth and quietly breath in through your nose, counting to four in your head. Hold your breath and count to seven. Breathe out through your mouth, making a whoosh sound while counting to eight. Repeat three more times for a total of four breath cycles.

Some people find relaxation exercises work too, while others find **mindfulness** useful.

2. GET MOVING

Exercise is a good way of dealing with anxiety.
Remember, activity doesn't have to be vigorous; try some gentle stretches, yoga, or seated exercises. Or just go for a walk. Going for a run, swimming, or taking part in a fitness class can give you something else to think about. Any amount of exercise will help.

Read more about **how exercise can help improve our mental health**.

3. KEEP A DIARY

It's important that we don't try to ignore our worries. Taking the time to keep a record of what's happening in your life and how it's affecting you can help you understand what is triggering your feelings of anxiety. Knowing this can help you better prepare for and manage situations that may cause anxiety.

Often, writing things down allows you to put them into perspective. When that's out of the way, you can move on with the rest of your day. This can help you take control and stop anxiety getting in the way of what you want to do.

4. CHALLENGE YOUR THOUGHTS

Anxiety can lead us to think about things repeatedly in our brain. When you catch yourself doing this try to write down the thought and to challenge it. Is what you're worrying about likely to happen? Have you had similar thoughts which have not turned into reality? This can make it easier to challenge the thoughts and stop them from overwhelming you.
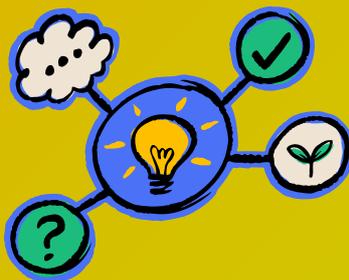
5. GET SUPPORT FOR MONEY WORRIES

A common cause of anxiety is money. If you're worried about not being able to pay bills, are struggling to repay debt, or aren't sure if you can cover your family's living costs, seek help. Make sure you are claiming all the government supports that you're entitled to. You can also speak to an organisation such as Citizens Advice or StepChange.

6. SPEND TIME IN NATURE

We know that spending time in nature has a positive impact on our mental health. It can help us feel calmer and less stressed. This can be as simple as tending some flowers in a window box or going for a walk in the local park or countryside. Any amount of time doing this is good for us, but to really get the benefit, try to spend maybe an hour or longer – when you can really connect with nature and immerse yourself. **Find out more about the benefits of nature**.

7. CONNECT WITH PEOPLE AND TALK ABOUT HOW YOU FEEL

Anxiety can feel very lonely. Connecting with other people can help a lot. Spend time with friends or meet other people through activities such as volunteering, sport or social clubs, or peer support groups. If you're able to talk to people about how you feel, it can help to reduce your anxiety. Sometimes saying what's worrying you out loud can take away its power over you.

8. TRY TO GET SOME QUALITY SLEEP OR REST

Resting and having a good night's sleep is hard when your head is full of worries but there are some things that can help. If anxious thoughts keep you awake, write them down in your diary. If sleep is still not coming, get up and have a drink (nothing with caffeine!) and wait until you're feeling more tired before going back to bed.

Keeping a note in your diary of your sleep patterns, this can help you work out a routine that will help you get better quality sleep.

9. TRY TO EAT A HEALTHY DIET

For many of us, feeling anxious might cause us to reach for sugary snacks, junk food or alcohol.
It's important that we don't turn to unhealthy foods or drinks to cope as they will do more damage in the longer term. Similarly, we should avoid smoking or taking recreational drugs.

Eating healthy food regularly helps us to regulate our blood sugar and gives us the energy we need to live well. Caffeine in coffee, tea and fizzy drinks can affect your mood and cause sleep problems so it's best to have these in moderation and not too close to bedtime.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

If your feelings of anxiety are not going away, are having a negative impact on your life, or often prevent you from doing things you need or want to do, seek support. **Speak to your GP or healthcare professional** about the support available in your area or **contact a helpline service**.