

panic fear
 misery tension
 butterflies
 overwhelming dread irritation uncertainty
 annoyance apprehension
 suffering nervous bellyache difficult
 exasperation fidgets pain bother
 angst nervousness
 sweats muscle shakes cold
 unease headache fright doubt pressure
 restlessness jitters terror jumps
 distress concerns concern
 worry misgiving burden mistrust
 nail-biting sweating
 aggravation fretfulness
 affliction scared uneasiness
 watchfulness
 trepidation
 foreboding

anxiety



University of Findlay

Office of Counseling Services

How to utilize this packet

STEP 1. Complete the Anxiety Symptoms Survey to identify the symptoms that you experience. Evaluate what symptoms are the most severe or happen the most frequently.

STEP 2. Educate yourself about normal anxiety and an anxiety disorder. Review the 4 common categories of anxiety symptoms. Examine the causes of anxiety disorders that could be present in your life. Look over the fight or flight response chart to further understand how anxiety symptoms affect your body.

STEP 3. Learn about the common distorted thinking patterns that are associated with anxiety. Explore questions to help learn how to challenge distorted thoughts.

STEP 4. Go through the relaxation techniques and find what works for you. Continue to practice these new skills, it will take some time before you are comfortable with them. These techniques will help you to better manage anxiety.

Anxiety Symptoms Checklist

- Feeling anxious, fearful, scared, tense, worried, etc.
- Rapid heart, heart palpitations, pounding heart
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Shortness of breath or smothering sensations
- Dry mouth or feeling of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea, stomach distress or gastrointestinal upset
- Urge to urinate or defecate
- Cold chills or hot flushes
- Dizziness, unsteady feelings, lightheadedness, or faintness
- Feelings of unreality or feeling detached from oneself
- Numbing or tingling sensations
- Visual changes (e.g., light seems too bright, spots, etc.)
- Blushing or red blotchy skin (especially around face)
- Muscle tension, aches, twitching, weakness or heaviness
- Thoughts or images of something bad happening to self (dying, not being able to cope, being responsible for something terrible happening, embarrassing ourselves, etc.)
- Thoughts or images of something bad happening to someone else (family member dying, a child being harmed, significant other having an accident, etc.)
- Thoughts or images of something else bad happening (house burning down, personal items being stolen, terrorism attack, etc.)
- Other frightening thoughts, images, urges, etc. or memories (tell your health professional as many details as you can about the content)
- Increased attention and scanning for things related to the source of danger
- Difficulty concentrating on things not related to the source of danger
- Difficulty making decisions about other things
- Frightening dreams or nightmares
- Avoidance of the feared situation, experience, place or people
- Needing to escape or leave the feared situation, experience, place or people
- Needing to be with a person or pet who makes me feel safe
- Getting reassurance from others
- Telling myself reassuring things (e.g., "It will be ok")
- Needing to find a safe place to go
- Scanning the situation for signs of danger
- Trying to distract myself
- Self-medicating the symptoms with drugs, alcohol or food
- Sleeping or napping so I don't have to think about it
- Other symptoms or problems:

What is anxiety?

When we feel threatened most of us will experience anxiety or fear. Some experiences will trigger anxiety in most of us (e.g., thinking about giving a talk to a large number of people or thinking a bear might be following you while walking in the forest). In our daily lives the things that make us feel anxiety can vary from person to person. For example, some people feel very anxious about snakes or spiders, while others have them for pets.

When it comes to anxiety, ALL humans are naturally programmed to react with the “fight-flight” response. Anxiety and the fight-flight response is a normal alarm reaction. We would not have survived as a species if we did not have anxiety and the fight-flight response as it allows us to sense danger and react in a way that keeps us safe. Anxiety causes changes in the body that increase our ability to: defend ourselves against the source of danger (“fight”) get away from something dangerous (“flight”).

How is normal anxiety different from an anxiety disorder?

All of us experience anxiety from time to time. Individuals with an anxiety disorder experience excessive symptoms of anxiety and associated symptoms on a regular basis for a prolonged period of time (months and years rather than just a few days or weeks).

When is it a problem?

Assessment for an anxiety disorder should be considered under the following circumstances:

- Symptoms of anxiety and associated problems have been excessive and difficult to control for an extended period of time (more than just a few days or sometimes weeks)
- Lead to significant emotional distress and personal suffering
- Lead to significant interference in work, school, home or social activities

Sometimes the symptoms of an anxiety disorder are present most or all of the time. Sometimes the symptoms are only present when facing certain situations, places, experiences or people. It is also common for symptoms of an anxiety disorder to go up and down over time. People with an anxiety disorder often find that their symptoms get worse when they are under stress or feeling depressed.

What are common symptoms of anxiety?

These can often be broken down into 4 categories: Emotions, Body Responses, Thoughts, and Behaviors:

1. Emotions (How we feel)

The emotions associated with anxiety can also be described as feeling fearful, worried, tense, on guard, scared, apprehensive, frightened, “freaked out”, etc. We usually know we are feeling the emotion of anxiety when we are also experiencing anxious body responses, thoughts, or behaviors.

2. Body Responses (How our bodies react)

Anxiety can trigger a range of body responses involving blood flow, the heart, the lungs, muscles, vision, hearing, skin, hair, digestion, saliva, and other body systems. Anxiety causes a range of physiological changes in the body that can lead to the following symptoms:

- Rapid heart, heart palpitations, pounding heart
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Shortness of breath or smothering sensations
- Dry mouth or feeling of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea, stomach distress or gastrointestinal upset
- Urge to urinate or defecate
- Cold chills or hot flushes
- Dizziness, unsteady feelings, lightheadedness, or faintness
- Feelings of unreality or feeling detached from oneself
- Numbing or tingling sensations
- Visual changes (e.g., light seems too bright, spots, etc.)
- Blushing or red blotchy skin (especially around face)
- Muscle tension, aches, twitching, weakness or heaviness

These symptoms of anxiety are uncomfortable but they are not dangerous (and can even be helpful). For example, our hearts pump faster when we feel anxious to help us get more blood to the muscles in our legs and arms that we need to run away, fight or remain still until the danger passes. We might also feel dizzy or light-headed due to the sudden increase in blood oxygen that happens as the heart pumps faster—this is a harmless side effect of the anxiety response. Some people also feel nauseous because the body shuts down our digestive system in the face of danger to save energy. The pupils in our eyes will often open up widely (allows us to see better) and often leads to light sensitivity or seeing spots. Each of the body symptoms listed above can be traced back to some kind of harmless or helpful change that is triggered by anxiety.

Note: The symptoms of anxiety do overlap with symptoms of some medical conditions. Always review any body symptoms of anxiety with your physician so that medical conditions can be ruled out.

3. Thoughts (What goes through our mind)

When we feel anxious our patterns of thinking can change. We are more likely to notice and think about things related to real or potential sources of danger. The following are some common thinking patterns associated with anxiety:

- Frightening thoughts, images, urges or memories
- Something bad happening to self (dying, not being able to cope, being responsible for something terrible happening, embarrassing ourselves, etc.)
- Something bad happening to someone else (family member dying, a child being harmed, significant other having an accident, etc.)
- Something else bad happening (house burning down, personal possession being stolen, car crash, terrorist attack, etc.)

- Increased attention and scanning for things related to the source of danger
- Difficulty concentrating on things not related to the source of danger
- Difficulty making decisions about other things
- Frightening dreams or nightmares

4. Behaviors (How we respond)

Anxiety triggers a number of coping behaviors. Most of us will feel a strong urge to do things that eliminate the danger or make us feel safer. These are referred to as safety behaviors and common examples are listed below:

- Avoiding the feared situation, experience, place or people
- Escaping or leaving the feared situation, experience, place or people
- Needing to be with a person or pet who makes us feel safe
- Getting reassurance from others
- Telling ourselves reassuring things (e.g., “It will be ok”)
- Finding a safe place to go to
- Scanning the situation for signs of danger
- Trying to distract ourselves
- Self-medicating the symptoms with drugs, alcohol or food
- Sleeping or napping so we don’t have to think about it
- Carrying items that may prevent or help cope with a panic attack (e.g., medications, cell phone, vomit bag, etc.).
- Compulsive behaviors that we repeat in an attempt to feel better (e.g., excessive cleaning or checking)
- Mental rituals that we repeat in our minds in an attempt to feel better (e.g., thinking the same word or phrase over and over)

These behaviors are only considered safety behaviors if the main purpose is to prevent or eliminate feelings of anxiety or panic. If safety behaviors become frequent, compulsive and disruptive they tend to increase the severity of an anxiety disorder. Most of the safety behaviors are used with good intentions. Unfortunately, they usually backfire and make the symptoms of anxiety **worse** in the long-term. For example, many people with an anxiety disorder who take time off work often experience even higher levels of anxiety when they avoid work. Safety or avoidance behaviors do not empower people in their ability to cope with anxiety symptoms. You don’t need to keep yourself safe from panic or anxiety by using safety or avoidance behaviors but you will never have a chance to find this out as long as you keep using them.

People with anxiety disorders often experience huge benefits in their symptoms if they are able to gradually decrease their use of safety behaviors. Research has also shown that people who don’t give up this unhelpful way of coping have a higher rate of relapse compared to people who give up their safety behaviors.

What causes anxiety disorders?

Many people wonder why there are parents with an anxiety disorder who have children who are free from anxiety problems or symptoms. Likewise, many children with an anxiety disorder have parents or relatives who are anxiety free. How can this be? The development of an

anxiety disorder usually results from a complex combination of a large number of factors including our previous experiences, our beliefs, and our environment—not just genetic and biological factors. However, most research studies tend to focus upon investigating only one factor at a time. Try to keep this in mind the next time you hear about any kind of research that has identified a risk factor for anxiety disorders, the odds are it is only one factor among many.

Genetic predisposition

To date there has been substantial research in the area of genetics and mental health, including anxiety disorders. Researchers have attempted to locate specific genetic markers that are associated with the occurrence of specific disorders (e.g., panic disorder). From these types of studies, we know that the tendency to feel anxiety or to have an anxiety disorder does run in families. What this means is that if you do suffer from an anxiety disorder there is a higher chance (compared to someone who does not suffer from an anxiety disorder) that other members of your family (e.g., child, sibling, parent, cousin, etc.) will also experience anxiety. We think of it as a vulnerability to developing anxiety. However, we have also learned that even if one family member experiences anxiety problems it is not a given that other family members will also have the same problems (in regards to the type of anxiety or degree of symptom severity).

Perfectionism

Higher levels of perfectionism have been associated with higher levels of anxiety and related symptoms. Perfectionistic goals for ourselves and others are typically not obtainable so they often add to the stress and suffering of a person with an anxiety disorder. If we continue to reach for perfectionistic goals (rather than standards of excellence that allow for some mistakes and flaws) we will be more likely to worry, feel anxious and engage in unhealthy ways of coping (e.g., avoiding things unless they can be done perfectly, not being able to delegate tasks to other people, spending too long on certain tasks, etc.). Most of the research has focused upon the role of perfectionism in OCD or social phobia and it is considered a risk factor in the development of both these disorders. That said, many individuals who can be described as perfectionistic do not have an anxiety disorder.

Environmental factors

Most of us experience a range of stressful experiences throughout their life without them directly causing an anxiety disorder. We do know that some environmental factors can increase the risk of experiencing problems with anxiety and for some people these problems become a full blown anxiety disorder. For example, some people with anxiety disorders experienced high levels of family strife and tension during their childhood. These kinds of experiences can trigger anxiety and unhealthy ways of coping that increase the risk for anxiety disorders. Some people grow up observing and learning from parents or other role models who are very anxious and avoidant. If a child takes on the same coping style and doesn't have a chance to learn healthier ways of coping they may be at increased risk for anxiety problems. Other times a person may develop a specific fear of a person, place, or thing after seeing something really bad or frightening happening. In summary, environmental factors are unlikely to be the main cause for an anxiety disorder but they are often one of several aggravating factors.

Fight Or Flight Response

When faced with a life-threatening danger it often makes sense to run away or, if that is not possible, to fight. The *fight or flight response* is an *automatic* survival mechanism which prepares the body to take these actions. All of the body sensations produced are happening for good reasons – to prepare your body to run away or fight – but may be experienced as uncomfortable when you do not know why they are happening.

Thoughts racing

Quicker thinking helps us to evaluate danger and make rapid decisions. It can be very difficult to concentrate on anything apart from the danger (or escape routes) when the fight or flight response is active

Changes to vision

Vision can become acute so that more attention can be paid to danger. You might notice 'tunnel vision', or vision becoming 'sharper'

Dry mouth

The mouth is part of the digestive system. Digestion shuts down during dangerous situations as energy is diverted towards the muscles

Heart beats faster

A faster heart beat feeds more blood to the muscles and enhances your ability to run away or fight

Nausea and 'butterflies' in the stomach

Blood is diverted away from the digestive system which can lead to feelings of nausea or 'butterflies'

Hands get cold

Blood vessels in the skin contract to force blood towards major muscle groups

Muscles tense

Muscles all over the body tense in order to get you ready to run away or fight. Muscles may also shake or tremble, particularly if you stay still, as a way of staying 'ready for action'

If we don't exercise (e.g. run away or fight) to use up the extra oxygen then we can quickly start to feel dizzy or lightheaded

Dizzy or lightheaded

Breathing becomes quicker and shallower

Quicker breathing takes in more oxygen to power the muscles. This makes the body more able to fight or run away

Adrenal glands release adrenaline

The adrenaline quickly signals other parts of the body to get ready to respond to danger

Bladder urgency

Muscles in the bladder sometimes relax in response to extreme stress

Palms become sweaty

When in danger the body sweats to keep cool. A cool machine is an efficient machine, so sweating makes the body more likely to survive a dangerous event

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

Over-generalizing



Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

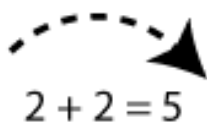
Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (Imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimization



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

*I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot*

Personalization

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault

Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault

Relaxation Techniques

When a person is confronted with anxiety, their body undergoes several changes and enters a special state called the *fight-or-flight response*. The body prepares to either fight or flee the perceived danger.

During the fight-or-flight response it's common to experience a "blank" mind, increased heart rate, sweating, tense muscles, and more. Unfortunately, these bodily responses do little good when it comes to protecting us from modern sources of anxiety.

Using a variety of skills, you can end the fight-or-flight response before the symptoms become too extreme. These skills *will* require practice to work effectively, so don't wait until the last minute to try them out!

Deep Breathing

It's natural to take long, deep breaths, when relaxed. However, during the fight-or-flight response, breathing becomes rapid and shallow. Deep breathing reverses that, and sends messages to the brain to begin calming the body. Practice will make your body respond more efficiently to deep breathing in the future.

Breathe in slowly. Count in your head and make sure the inward breath lasts at least 5 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of the air filling your lungs.

Hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds (again, keep count). You don't want to feel uncomfortable, but it should last quite a bit longer than an ordinary breath.

Breathe out very slowly for 5 to 10 seconds (count!). Pretend like you're breathing through a straw to slow yourself down. Try using a real straw to practice.

Repeat the breathing process until you feel calm.

Imagery

Think about some of your favorite and least favorite places. If you think about the place hard enough—if you really try to think about what it's like—you may begin to have feelings you associate with that location. Our brain has the ability to create emotional reactions based entirely off of our thoughts. The imagery technique uses this to its advantage.

Make sure you're somewhere quiet without too much noise or distraction. You'll need a few minutes to just spend quietly, in your mind.

Think of a place that's calming for you. Some examples are the beach, hiking on a mountain, relaxing at home with a friend, or playing with a pet.

Relaxation Techniques

Paint a picture of the calming place in your mind. Don't just think of the place briefly—imagine every little detail. Go through each of your senses and imagine what you would experience in your relaxing place. Here's an example using a beach:

- a. **Sight:** The sun is high in the sky and you're surrounded by white sand. There's no one else around. The water is a greenish-blue and waves are calmly rolling in from the ocean.
- b. **Sound:** You can hear the deep pounding and splashing of the waves. There are seagulls somewhere in the background.
- c. **Touch:** The sun is warm on your back, but a breeze cools you down just enough. You can feel sand moving between your toes.
- d. **Taste:** You have a glass of lemonade that's sweet, tart, and refreshing.
- e. **Smell:** You can smell the fresh ocean air, full of salt and calming aromas.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

During the fight-or-flight response, the tension in our muscles increases. This can lead to a feeling of stiffness, or even back and neck pain. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches us to become more aware of this tension so we can better identify and address stress.

Find a private and quiet location. You should sit or lie down somewhere comfortable.

The idea of this technique is to intentionally tense each muscle, and then to release the tension. Let's practice with your feet.

- a. Tense the muscles in your toes by curling them into your foot. Notice how it feels when your foot is tense. Hold the tension for 5 seconds.
- b. Release the tension from your toes. Let them relax. Notice how your toes feel differently after you release the tension.
- c. Tense the muscles all throughout your calf. Hold it for 5 seconds. Notice how the feeling of tension in your leg feels.
- d. Release the tension from your calf, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs.

Follow this pattern of tensing and releasing tension all throughout your body. After you finish with your feet and legs, move up through your torso, arms, hands, neck, and head.

Mindfulness Exercises



Mindfulness Meditation

Find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments. To begin, you might want to set a timer for about 10 minutes, but after some experience you should not be too concerned about the length of time you spend meditating.

Begin by bringing your attention to the present moment by noticing your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and then leaves your body. Before long, your mind will begin to wander, pulling you out of the present moment. That's ok. Notice your thoughts and feelings as if you are an outside observer watching what's happening in your brain. Take note, and allow yourself to return to your breathing.

Sometimes you might feel frustrated or bored. That's fine—these are just a few more feelings to notice. Your mind might start to plan an upcoming weekend, or worry about a responsibility. Notice where your thoughts are going, and accept what's happening.

Whenever you are able to, return your concentration to your breathing. Continue this process until your timer rings, or until you are ready to be done.



Body Scan

During the body scan exercise you will pay close attention to physical sensations throughout your body. The goal isn't to change or relax your body, but instead to notice and become more aware of it. Don't worry too much about how long you practice, but do move slowly.

Begin by paying attention to the sensations in your feet. Notice any sensations such as warmth, coolness, pressure, pain, or a breeze moving over your skin. Slowly move up your body—to your calves, thighs, pelvis, stomach, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and finally your head. Spend some time on each of these body parts, just noticing the sensations.

After you travel up your body, begin to move back down, through each body part, until you reach your feet again. Remember: move slowly, and just pay attention.



Mindful Eating

Choose a food you would like to practice with (preferably something you can hold in your hand without getting messy). Something as simple as a single raisin will work well. Move slowly through these steps, taking a moment to focus on each one.

Before you pick up your food, notice how it looks on the table in front of you. Notice its color, how the light reflects from its surface, and its size.

Mindfulness Exercises

Now, pick up the food. Notice the weight, and how the food feels against your skin. Roll the object between your fingers, or roll it in your hand, and notice its texture. Notice if it's smooth, rough, slick, soft, firm or if it has any other properties. Hold the food to your nose, and pay attention to its smell.

Next, place the food in your mouth, on your tongue, but don't eat it. Notice how it feels in your mouth. Does the texture feel the same as on your hand? What do you taste? Roll the food around in your mouth and pay attention to the feeling.

Finally, begin to slowly chew your food. Notice how your teeth sink into it, and how the texture is different inside. Pay close attention to the flavor, and how it spreads across your tongue. Notice how your body changes—does your mouth fill with saliva? Does your tongue feel hot or cold? Continue to chew your food, paying close attention to the many sensations as you finish.

Five Senses

Use this exercise to quickly ground yourself in the present when you only have a moment. The goal is to notice something that you are currently experiencing through each of your senses.

What are 5 things you can see? Look around you and notice 5 things you hadn't noticed before. Maybe a pattern on a wall, light reflecting from a surface, or a knick-knack in the corner of a room.

What are 4 things you can feel? Maybe you can feel the pressure of your feet on the floor, your shirt resting on your shoulders, or the temperature on your skin. Pick up an object and notice its texture.

What are 3 things you can hear? Notice all the background sounds you had been filtering out, such as an air-conditioning, birds chirping, or cars on a distant street.

What are 2 things you can smell? Maybe you can smell flowers, coffee, or freshly cut grass. It doesn't have to be a nice smell either: maybe there's an overflowing trash can or sewer.

What is 1 thing you can taste? Pop a piece of gum in your mouth, sip a drink, eat a snack if you have one, or simply notice how your mouth tastes. "Taste" the air to see how it feels on your tongue.

The numbers for each sense are only a guideline. Feel free to do more or less of each. Also, try this exercise while doing an activity like washing dishes, listening to music, or going for a walk.