



# Coping with stressful and anxious feelings

This booklet helps us understand why we get stressful and anxious feelings and how we can manage them.

 mind

# What are feelings of stress and anxiety?

We all feel stressed or anxious from time to time. We get these feelings when we're worried about something. These feelings can also make our worries seem worse than they really are.

Many of us feel stressed or anxious by things like exams or tests at school. But there are many other situations, like:

- If things are difficult at home
- If we're joining a new class or school
- If we've fallen out with friends
- If someone close to us has died, or a pet
- Sometimes we might worry about we look like, or other things about who we are



These feelings can affect our bodies too. When we feel stressed or anxious, we might:

- Start to feel panicky
- Get hot and sweaty
- Find it hard to get to sleep

**Having stressed and anxious feelings is perfectly normal from time to time.** In fact, these feelings can sometimes help us. Feeling a little anxious can help us to focus under pressure, like an exam. But if you have these feelings a lot and they're making you unhappy, then it's important to try and manage them.

🔗 Mental wellbeing is on a spectrum – we can be ill and struggling and well and functioning. It constantly changes which can be exhausting, but it's also a reminder that things will change for the better again.🔗



# Why do we feel stressed or anxious?

**Our bodies are programmed to react to danger.** The feeling of anxiety or stress is a natural, physical response in our bodies – it starts in the brain. But if you have these feelings a lot of the time, then it might stop your enjoyment of everyday life.

When things happen that make us feel scared, under pressure or threatened, our bodies release hormones. One of these is called **adrenaline**. Adrenaline makes us get ready to respond to danger. Humans developed this response thousands of years ago to help us survive. This response would help if we were running from a dangerous animal in those days, but in everyday life, that's not very likely to happen.

Today, we're more likely to feel anxious or stressed by schoolwork, or a row at home, or another problem. But because our bodies release adrenaline no matter what the stressful situation, we get those physical feelings and emotions.

For some of us, feeling anxious or stressed can lead to panic attacks. This is when the feelings are overwhelming and take over our bodies and minds. Panic attacks can last between 5 and 20 minutes – they might feel very scary. Working on ways to cope with stress and anxiety can reduce the chance of panic attacks happening.



# How to recognise when we're stressed or anxious

When we're feeling stressed or anxious, we might have different feelings in our minds – **thoughts and emotions** – and our bodies – **physical**.



## Thoughts and emotions

- Feelings of extreme fear or panic
- Feeling on edge or alert about what's happening around you
- Finding it hard to focus
- Wanting to escape from the situation you are in
- Not enjoying things and losing your sense of humour

## Physical feelings

- Breathing fast and heavily
- Feeling hot and sweaty
- Dry mouth
- Shaking and feeling dizzy, fainting
- Faster heartbeat
- Tummy aches and feeling sick
- Difficulty sleeping



# Managing feelings of stress and anxiety

There are things we can all do to help us manage feelings of stress and anxiety. Here are some examples.



## Try doing some exercise

We explained how stress and anxious feelings are linked to **adrenaline** – the hormone that makes us run faster and fight harder to escape from danger. Because it's a natural response of what our body **thinks** we must do to escape from danger, running can reduce feelings of stress and anxiety.

Any type of exercise, not just running, releases another hormone called **endorphin**. This helps us to feel happier and even helps us sleep more easily.



Because of this, exercising when we feel stressed or anxious can help. Regular exercise, like football, swimming, walking or dancing, can all help us manage stress and anxiety.

**You could try doing 10 minutes of exercise, at least 3 times a week.** But make sure you pick an exercise and an amount of time that you feel able to do.

You could fill in the diary below to help you plan ahead.

Day	What exercise will I do?
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	



## Talk to someone or write down how you feel

You might have heard the phrase ‘**a problem shared, is a problem halved**’. Often it really is true. Talking to someone you trust about how you’re feeling can be very helpful. This could be a family member, carer, guardian, partner, teacher or friend.

“ Having a discussion with family members and close friends about what’s been effective for boosting my wellbeing in the past, allows them to act as a prompt in times of need.”

Writing things down can also be very helpful. It can help us to understand the way we’re feeling and think through some things that can help. You could keep a diary about the way you feel, or you could use the table below. We’ve given an example to help.

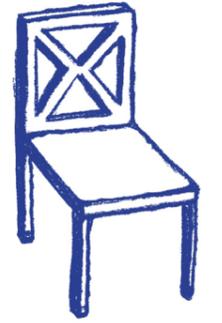
I feel stressed or anxious when...	In this situation my body feels...	I feel better if I...
I have exams	I get sweaty, I start to feel dizzy and sick	Go for a run or talk to my brother about it

## Try 3/5 breathing

When we feel stressed or anxious, it can affect the way we breathe.

We might take short, fast breaths from high up in our body, near our chest. Breathing too quickly can mean we take in **too much oxygen**, which can make us feel **light-headed** and **panicky**.

If you notice that you’re breathing quickly, or starting to feel light-headed, then **3/5 breathing can help you feel calmer**.



- 1 Sit comfortably in a straight-backed chair, or lie on your back if you prefer.
- 2 Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach, just below your belly button.
- 3 Breathe in and count to 3 as you do so.
- 4 Hold that breath for 2 seconds.
- 5 Now breathe out and count to 5 at the same pace.
- 6 Do this again and again until you feel more relaxed.

**For some of us, 3/5 breathing might feel uncomfortable.** You can try counting to any number that helps you breathe more deeply. Slowly build up to a higher number as you feel calmer and more confident at 3/5 breathing.



## **We're Mind.**

We understand mental health and wellbeing.  
We're here if you need us for support and advice.  
We help everyone understand mental health  
problems, so no one has to feel alone.

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