



Managing Anxiety and Stress

Anxiety and Stress

Anxiety is a nasty emotion because it is experienced intensely. The emotional component is what people are typically most aware of, the feelings of fear, apprehension and dread. The physical component of anxiety includes increased heart rate, rapid breathing, shaking and even dizziness.

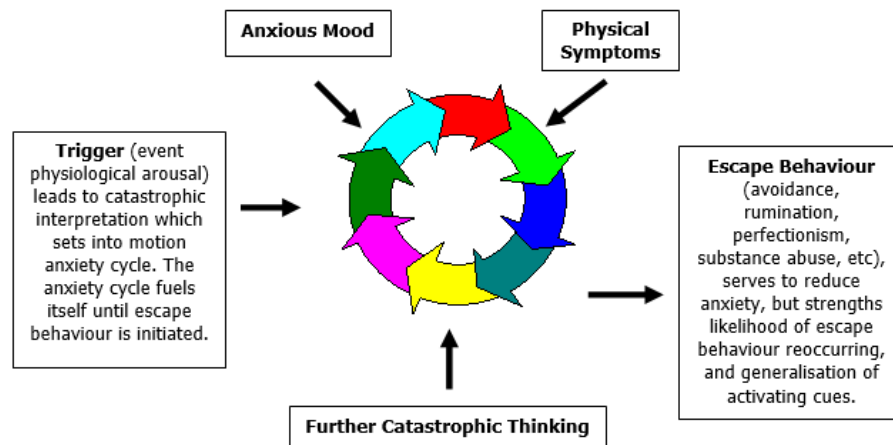
Anyone who has experienced intense anxiety is aware of the deficits in thinking and concentration that usually occur. Anxiety seems to automatically cause a narrowing of attention. For example, an individual with fears of evaluation may be so consumed with how they are coming across to people in the audience that they cannot remember the content of their lecture – even though the material may be second nature. Such forms of distortions are common in abnormal anxiety responses.

Anxious individuals typically overestimate the danger and underestimate their ability to control it.

The performance anxious person may overestimate the scrutiny of those in the audience and underestimate their speech skills. The person may think “That person keeps looking at her watch! They are bored with my talk! I am really terrible.” These sorts of **distortions perpetuate, and even exacerbate anxiety.**

As the figure below shows, anxiety can become a powerful **self-fulfilling cycle.**

- Anxiety increases physical symptoms, which increases distorted thinking which increases anxiety and so on.
- These intense symptoms drive the person to some sort of escape response.
- When escape is initiated, it is negatively reinforced by virtue of a rapid reduction of anxiety symptoms.
- When anxiety symptoms reoccur, so does the urge to escape, which has proven effective in the past.





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Managing Anxiety and Stress – Things you can do

Negative Thinking - Worrying

The Problem of Worrying - Worrying or negative repetitive thinking about possible adverse situations is one of the most destructive and harmful ways of thinking. People who worry a lot tend to experience high levels of anxiety and tension that adversely affect their physical health. This can add further complications when combined with a medical condition.

Reducing Worry - Trying to stop worrying about things can be a seemingly impossible task. Your Psychologist is highly skilled in this area having been trained extensively in the management of anxiety and worry. Some initial strategies to get you started are outlined below:

- When you find yourself worrying about things don't try to stop yourself initially but rather systematically write down the likely consequences or concerns on a piece of paper. Make sure that in doing this you not only write down the possible negative outcomes but also the positive outcomes no matter how likely or unlikely. Next look at each scenario and think about any possible good points and remind yourself that though you may not like it you can and will be able to cope.
- If you are lacking in any information about issues (eg., prognosis or likely outcomes and timeframes of medical conditions) then pursue further information and education through appropriate sources (eg., medical or clinical specialists).
- Try to assess realistically your worries and develop other areas to think about. Find a good friend to talk to (or better still, see your psychologist) to pursue this process.
- Increase the amount of activity and variety in each day to provide other things to focus on such as reading, walking, watching a movie or any other activity that does not adversely impact upon your medical condition.

Stress and Tension

Negative Effects of Stress and Tension - Stress and tension refer to physical arousal in the form of muscle tension and contraction. Stressful muscle tension can be experienced in a variety of areas including the eyes, jaw, neck, shoulders, lower back and abdominal area. Prolonged muscle tension can lead to aches and pains ranging from mild headaches or stiff back to chronic migraines and muscular spasms and injury.

Reduction Of Physical Tension and Stress - Reducing the physical sign of stress through recognizing and relaxing muscles in the body is not as easy as it sounds. Firstly you have to learn to recognise when you are stressed and which muscle groups are the most tense. Then you need to develop skills in systematically relaxing all your muscles - particularly those that are most tense. This area takes a lot of practice and skill to master and your psychologist can provide expert skills training in relaxation and stress reduction. The following information provides some starting points to assist you in reducing stress and physical tension:

- Learn to recognise the signs of physical tension in your body. This is done by stopping and carefully thinking about how all the different muscles in your body are feeling at regular intervals everyday. By doing this you will identify the muscle groups that hold the most tension when you are feeling stressed.



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- Practice regular slow and deep breathing. Do this at regular intervals throughout the day particularly when you begin to feel tense and stressed. As you exhale say the word 'calm' to yourself in a soothing manner.
- Begin learning to relax. Develop pleasant imagery (ie., scenery or pleasant memories) and music which you find soothing and calming and invoke these images and sounds when stressed.
- Learn a form of progressive muscle relaxation. This is where you systematically contract and relax all the muscles in your body to induce a strong feeling of physical relaxation. It is generally best to see your psychologist for initial training and instruction in this area.