

## LIKEMIND

An online mental health companion for young people



# Wellbeing and self-help

One thing that young people have told us is that sometimes, you just want information on what you can do yourself to make things better.

If that's how you feel at the moment, then this page is for you.

The information here tells you a little about how to help yourself with anxiety and with sleep problems. You'll also find lots of helpful websites and phone numbers on the Advice and Support page about Talking to Someone, and videos, books and apps on the Resource page for people who have unusual distressing experiences. If you find something useful and want to share it, you can do that through the Forum.

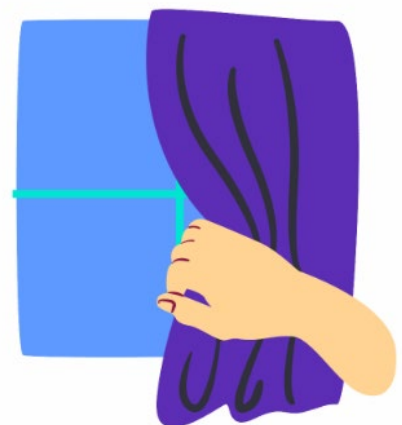


## Managing anxiety

Anxiety is a normal response to danger. It is the result of something called the 'fight or flight' response.

The 'fight or flight' response is a body response that prepares you to fight, or to 'flee' or run away from danger. Your heart starts to beat faster, your breathing gets quicker and more blood and oxygen goes to your muscles, so you may feel shaky, dizzy, sweaty or sick.

The more threatening you think a situation is and the less you feel able to cope with it, the more anxious you will feel, and the more of a fight or flight response you will have.



**Anxiety is a normal response to danger.**

Problematic anxiety happens when this fight-flight response is kicked off in situations that would normally be thought of as safe, like crowds and other busy or confined places. This can happen when your general stress levels are higher than normal.

The difficulty with problematic anxiety is that this response is triggered in previously 'safe' situations so that you now want to 'flee'. If you then run away and avoid these situations, this strengthens beliefs that these are 'threatening' situations that you can't cope with and that should be avoided. This makes anxiety worse. It also means that you will gradually be able to do less and less.



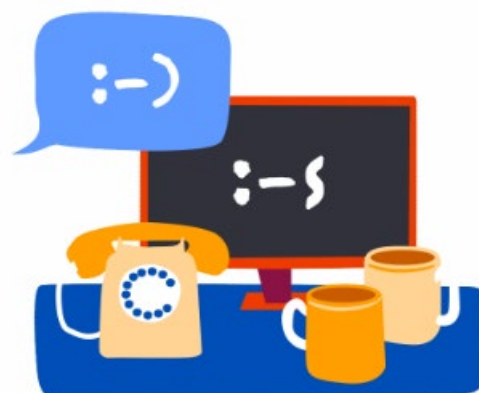
## Problematic anxiety happens when this fight-flight response is kicked off in situations that would normally be thought of as safe, such as crowds and busy confined spaces

The way to tackle this type of anxiety is to gradually expose yourself to situations that are experienced as 'a bit threatening', staying in the situation until your anxiety starts to come down. You might make a list of situations, starting with easier ones, and moving up to more difficult ones.

Notice your anxiety before and during the situation. You could try rating it: giving it a score between 0 and 10, where 0 is not at all anxious and 10 is the most anxious you could possibly be. You should aim to expose yourself to situations which you rate at most at about a 7 for anxiety.

Stay in the situation until your anxiety comes down to a low level (this could take up to one and a half hours). Practice going into this same situation, each day, teaching your body and brain that the situation is not threatening, until the situation is easy and you no longer feel very anxious.

## Stay in the anxiety provoking situation until your anxiety comes down to a low level (this could take up to about an hour or an hour and a half)



Then take the next situation on your list and do the same thing again, until you gradually get your anxiety under control and your life back on track.

If anxiety is because the situations really are more threatening, e.g. if they make voice hearing worse, you may need to build up your coping strategies first, so that you can manage these situations.

## Improving sleep

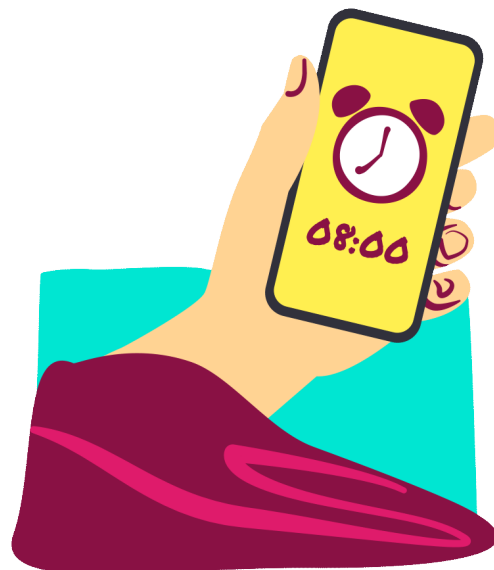
Most people will experience difficulty sleeping at some time in their lives, but a good night's sleep is extremely important for mental and physical wellbeing.

Poor sleep is associated with, and affected by, a range of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, experiences of voice hearing and paranoia. Being tired makes it harder to cope with daily stresses and other problems. That's why identifying the problem early and creating an action plan for managing it is really important.

If you are having trouble with getting a good night's sleep then you might want to consider the following suggestions:

Do:

- Try to relax before going to bed (you might want to try using guided relaxation CDs/apps, reading a book or having a bath)
- Go to bed at the same time every night and get out of bed at the same time every day (even if you haven't slept well! Sleeping in because you didn't sleep well will only make it harder to go to sleep again the next night).
- Eat a small snack if you are hungry (foods high in the chemical tryptophan such as porridge, oats and bananas can promote sleep).
- Try to develop a bedtime routine (you may want to take a bath or have a warm milky drink- but not one with caffeine in!). These activities will become associated with sleep and can make you feel more tired.



**Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every day**

- Write down any worries that are keeping you awake and tell yourself that you will look at them in the morning. If you wake up in the night with worries, you could keep a notebook by your bed.
- Try and get at least 30 minutes of exercise a day (going for a walk, playing football, swimming or dancing are just some ideas!)
- Avoid watching TV, playing games or going on your phone or i-pad while in bed
- Try to keep a comfortable sleeping environment (you may want to de-clutter your room and try to ensure it's not too hot or too cold, too light or too noisy).
- If you find your mind is busy with worries, try counting backwards from 300.



## Try to maintain a comfortable sleep environment

### Don't:

- Don't drink caffeinated drinks in the evening or at night (including tea, coffee and some fizzy drinks)
- Don't drink too much alcohol or smoke cigarettes late at night (although you might feel that alcohol makes you drowsy, don't be fooled. Like caffeine and nicotine, alcohol can make for a restless night)
- Don't go to bed too hungry or too full
- Don't keep checking the time as this may make you feel more anxious/frustrated
- Don't take a nap during the day
- Don't do any strenuous exercise too close to go to bed
- Don't use your bedroom to work in, if you can help it. Keep this as a room to relax in.
- Don't do anything mentally stimulating (like work or computer games) in the last hour or two before bed.



- Don't spend hours lying in bed trying to go to sleep. If you can't sleep get up for 20-30 minutes, move to another room, do something mildly distracting or relaxing like reading or listening to quiet music, and then go back to bed and try again.

## Don't spend hours lying in bed trying to go to sleep. If you can't sleep move to another room for 20-30 minutes, do something relaxing, and then go back to bed and try again

If you are having trouble sleeping, you might want to consider making some small changes to your bedtime routine and seeing if this makes a difference. You may find it helpful to record your sleep pattern in an [activity diary](#). This can help you to notice what's happening with your sleep, what affects it and what helps, so you can notice even small changes.

If your problems with sleep are because of unusual distressing experiences, voice hearing, paranoia, anxiety, worry, depression or other mental health problems, you may want to get some help for these things as this might improve your sleep too.

It's important to remember that getting problematic sleep patterns under control can take time and very rarely happens overnight, so pace yourself and try to stay positive!

If you want to read more, you could have a look at Daniel Freeman's book ['Know Your Mind'](#) which has a section on sleep problems. Also, you could take a look at the Resources section for books, websites, apps and videos that might be helpful.

