

What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a normal healthy reaction – it happens to everyone at times of danger or in worrying situations.
- Tension and anxiety are common problems: affecting about one tenth of the general adult population every year.
- Moderate amounts of anxiety improve our performance.
- Anxiety becomes a problem when it interferes with our everyday lives.
- Anxiety after serious illness such as cancer can be about different things such as fear of recurrence.

How does anxiety affect us?

<p><u>Emotions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * On edge * Nervous * Panicky * Stressed * Irritable/low patience threshold * Uptight 	<p><u>Thinking styles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * You often worry 'what if' something bad happens * Your mind jumps from worry to worry * You often imagine the worst case scenarios * You are always on the look-out for danger
<p><u>Physical sensations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Tense body/Muscular pain * Dizzy/Faint * Chest tight or painful * Stomach Churning * Trembling or tingling sensations * Heart racing/palpitations * Breathing faster or slower than usual * Concentration difficulties 	<p><u>Behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Avoid doing things * Pace around/Find it hard to relax * Snap at people too easily * Get easily flustered * Talk very quickly * Impulsive * Excessive eating/loss of appetite * Holding your breath

Why do we get anxious?

Anxiety is activated when we feel threatened.

Threats can come in all shapes and sizes. Whilst our ancestors many years ago may have been threatened by predators, modern day threats can be very different but still cause the same anxiety reaction.

Our “threat system” is often activated when we feel that our personal safety or life is at risk or if the safety or life of loved ones could be at risk. An example is been diagnosed with a serious illness.

Once we perceive a threat to ourselves, certain hormones such as adrenaline are released and nerve impulses are sent to the nervous system to enable us to fight or flee the danger.

Physical sensations triggered by adrenaline include:

- Tension
- Heart palpitations
- Breathlessness
- Increased Heart Rate & Blood pressure

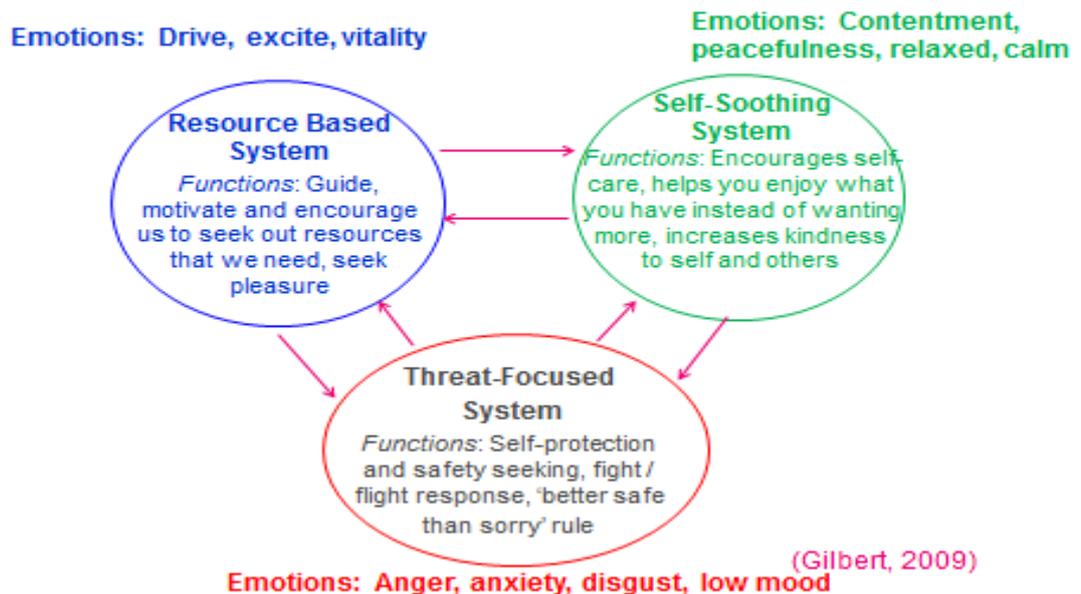
When our threat system is activated we can be on high alert for future similar threats.

We try to predict, plan and prevent.

- We may notice thinking “what if...”
- We may catastrophize (expect something really bad to happen)
- We may be hypervigilant (looking for danger)
- We may start to avoid things that make us anxious.

Turning down anxiety

Reducing Anxiety – Balancing our Emotional Systems



This model shows that we have three emotional systems that ideally should be in balance to reduce the threat system from taking over.

Increasing the input of the resource-based and self-soothing systems can help us to bring down anxiety.

Different types of coping

Threat Based coping: Avoidance, defensiveness, isolation from others and keeping difficult emotions to oneself.

Self-Soothing coping: *Relaxation*, self-compassion, laughing, engaging in hobbies, *mindfulness* and positive self-talk.

Resource-Based coping: Talking to others, gathering information, problem-solving and keeping active.

4 ways to reduce anxiety include

1. Problem-solving
2. Relaxation
3. Managing anxious thoughts
4. Mindfulness

(see handouts and section on mindfulness and relaxation for more information)