

Anxiety

**WHAT
TO DO?**

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Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal human reaction. We all experience anxiety in situations that we may perceive as challenging, difficult or stressful. If we didn't feel anxious in certain situations, we would risk falling off cliffs or being underwater until we drowned.

Moderate levels of anxiety are adaptive because they can motivate us to perform certain tasks and thus improve our performance. For example, anxiety before exams increases the levels of adrenaline and other stress hormones in our bodies; we become more alert and our thinking is clearer and more focused.

Normal levels of anxiety are rarely problematic, as they quickly return to normal once the stressful situation has passed. However, when anxiety is excessive, we are invaded by a feeling of insecurity or a fear that has no real basis but persists over time and prevents us from living a normal day-to-day life.



What causes anxiety?

Changes, transitions or periods of personal crisis can trigger anxiety, namely:

- Leaving home;
- Leaving home to study abroad;
- Work and exams pressure;
- Relationship problems;
- Loneliness;
- Financial difficulties;
- Doubts about the future;
- Substance abuse, such as alcohol and drugs consumption, coffee, tea, smoking;
- Traumatic situations.

How do I know if I'm anxious?

Anxiety can take different forms and expressions, such as:

- Generalised or specific anxiety: about a wide range of situations and issues or only about specific events (e.g., exams, social situations);
- Worried thoughts: thinking repeatedly about a problem to find a solution;
- Phobia: Excessive and unrealistic fear of an object, person, animal, activity or situation that leads to avoidance;
- Hypochondria: anxiety about getting seriously ill;
- Panic attacks: episodes of intense anxiety usually develop abruptly forcing the person to leave their immediate context.

These types of anxiety can be chronic (long-lasting), sporadic (present and very active), or both.

Warning signs!

Physical symptoms:

- Palpitations/racing heartbeat;
- Dry mouth and throat;
- Shortness of breath and/or over-breathing;
- Excessive sweating;
- Headaches, dizziness;
- Nausea and vomiting;
- Excessive sweating;
- Sleep disturbance;
- Diarrhoea;
- Tense muscles.

Emotional symptoms:

- Fatigue;
- Irritability;
- Excessive worry;
- Poor concentration;
- Restlessness.

If these symptoms have been present on more than half of your days for at least 6 months, and you feel that they are significantly affecting your social and academic life, or preventing you from doing everyday activities, you should seek specialist help.





Useful tips

There are some paradoxes about anxiety that you should have in mind:

- You may increase your anxiety by trying to control or eliminate all symptoms;
- You may conclude that you're maintaining your anxiety because you think it's wrong not to worry, so you become more anxious when you relax. This is particularly true in the case of exams, where people feel that something is wrong if they don't worry;

→ You can get angry about worrying because it's something that's frowned upon.

What can I do?

Accept that a certain degree of anxiety is normal, functional and harmless. Don't assume that complete relief of symptoms is the only solution. This will reduce your fears and help you control;

Find out how your anxiety manifests itself by monitoring yourself;

Identify the type of worry you are experiencing. If it manifests itself in a particular way, seek appropriate help;

If you tend to be a worrier or if something is troubling you, find someone to talk to about what you are feeling. Others can give you a different perspective on how to solve your problems;

Find out how you react in different situations and identify the most difficult ones;

If you are avoiding a situation where that makes you feel particularly anxious, you may consider developing a plan to gradually desensitise yourself to this situation.

Solve big problems by breaking them down into small parts. Example - the fear of public speaking: monitor your behaviour; tell the teacher about prepare the material to be presented in advance; make a recording; practise the presentation with the help of a friend; try to be as calm as possible on the day of the presentation;

Consider relaxation techniques to reduce stress. These can help you prepare for difficult situations.

Try to understand the causes of your anxiety, and how you can "deal" with it. There are no magic solutions but there are ways of understanding and containing anxiety.



Contacts

To make an appointment for a screening assessment you can:

Email: **sas.gaa@isc-te-iul.pt**
Telephone: **+351 210 464 039** ou **+351 217 903 000**
options 1 and 4
During office hours: **9:30 – 12:30** and **14:30 – 16:30**

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