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Wellbeing:

Managing Stress and Anxiety

What is the difference between stress and anxiety?

While the symptoms of stress and anxiety feel very similar it is important to realise the differences between the two.

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Stress is an *external* reaction to a situation. You might feel stressed when there's an exam coming up, during an argument or while writing an important piece of coursework. However the feelings associated with being stressed usually disappear once these situations are resolved. Stress can lead to anxiety.

Anxiety is an *internal* reaction to stress. We all feel anxious at times, however it is important to recognise when it's becoming a problem for you. For example, if you have a persistent feeling of worry or dread in situations that aren't actually threatening or after a concern has passed.

Why do we feel anxious?

- Anxiety is a natural defence mechanism that developed millions of years ago, in order to keep us safe from danger.
- Nowadays we might worry about things that aren't necessarily dangerous, but our bodies still react in the same way.
- Anxiety is therefore a perfectly natural response. However, a simple worry can sometimes lead into a full blown panic attack so it is crucial that we know how to recognise and manage our anxiety.

Recognising anxiety

Anxiety can change the way we think and behave. Symptoms include:

- Restlessness
- A feeling of dread
- A feeling of being “on-edge”
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Irritability

It can cause physical reactions too:

- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Heart palpitations (a noticeably strong, fast heartbeat)
- Sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Dry mouth.

So how do I manage it?

If you're feeling very overwhelmed, you should seek the support of a trusted adult, and possibly a medical professional like your GP so they can provide support.

In the meanwhile, the following mindfulness exercises can help you find some calmness during stressful times.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been found to massively reduce the symptoms of anxiety. It works by teaching the brain to stay in the present, instead of worrying about the past or future. It can also improve concentration, the ability to focus, and help with academic performance.

Mindfulness is about watching your thoughts and feelings without 'hanging on' to them for too long. When you 'hang on' to thoughts they can become bigger than they should be, especially in minds that are prone to anxiety.

Take a minute technique

Minds quite like to wander, especially anxious ones, so staying in the moment can take some practice. Here's how:

- Get comfy and close your eyes.
- Notice your breathing. How does the air feel as you draw it inside you? Notice the sensation of the air, or your belly rising and falling. Notice your heart beating. If your mind starts to wander, come back to this.
- Now, what can you hear? What can you feel outside of you and inside your body? If your mind starts to wander, focus on your breathing again.

Drop anchor technique

This is a really easy technique that can be practiced anywhere.

- Stand with your feet firmly on the ground, shoulder-width apart.
- Push down through your feet and feel the ground steady beneath you.
- Notice how your leg muscles feel as you push down through your feet.
- Pay attention to different parts of your body; starting with your head and working all the way down, until you can feel the connection between your feet and the ground.
- Take 5 deep, slow breaths to finish.

Chocolate Square technique

You need: A small piece of chocolate; a couple of squares from a bar works best.

Relax your body: Take a few deep breaths and un-tense your muscles to relax your body. You should start your meditation as physically relaxed as possible.

Smell, gaze, and nibble: First of all, look at the chocolate and notice everything about it. What texture does it have? Shiny, smooth? Sharp or soft edges?

Next, smell the chocolate; how does it make you feel? Does your mouth water?

Now, take a small bite of your chocolate. Let it sit on your tongue and melt in your mouth. Notice the flavours.

Chocolate Square technique

Let yourself be completely absorbed in what you're experiencing *right now*.

Continue your deep breathing, and concentrate on the sensations in your mouth.

Focus on sensations: As you swallow, focus on how it feels going down. Notice how your mouth feels empty. Then, as you take a second bite, try to notice how your arm feels as you raise the chocolate to your mouth, how it feels between your fingers. Again, focus on the sensations you are feeling in the present moment.

Chocolate Square technique

Re-focus on the present: If other thoughts come into your mind during your chocolate meditation, gently refocus your attention to the flavors and sensations associated with the chocolate. Stay in the present as much as you possibly can.

Savour this feeling: When you're done savouring your chocolate, revisit the feeling throughout your day, and feel more relaxed.

Organisations that help - Websites

Suicide / Feeling Helpless	Youngminds.org.uk / Papyrus-uk.org / childline.org.uk
Staying safe online	Thinkuknow.co.uk / ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/
Sexuality / Homophobia	Youngstonewall.org.uk / bgiok.org.uk / eachaction.org.uk
Sexual Abuse	Rapecrisis.org.uk / Childline.org.uk
Self-harm	Youngminds.org.uk / selfharm.co.uk / childline.org.uk
Physical / emotional abuse	Childline.org.uk / Youngminds.org.uk
Bullying	Bullybusters.org.uk / childline.org.uk / bullying.co.uk
Anxiety / Panic attacks	Childline.org.uk / themix.org.uk / youngminds.org.uk
Eating disorders	Beateatingdisorders.org.uk / Childline.org.uk
Info about local services for young people	youthaccess.org.uk

Organisations that help - Phone numbers

Childline (up to age 19)	0800 1111
NSPCC	0808 800 5000
Family Lives	0808 800 2222
Frank (Substance Support)	0300 123 6600
Beat - Eating Disorders	0808 801 0711
Sexual Health Line	0300 123 7123
Rape Crisis	0808 802 9999
Victim Support	0845 3030 900
Forced Marriage Unit	0207 008 0151
Karma Nirvana (Honour-based Abuse)	0800 599 9247
The Mix	0808 808 4994
Stonewall	0800 050 2020

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