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Anxiety, Stress & Mental Health



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Anxiety & Wellbeing

- ▶ It is important to remember, alongside physical health, we all need to maintain our mental health
- ▶ Many people experience signs of anxiety, stress or depression
- ▶ It may not always impact or day to day lives, however making time to do things we enjoy and find time for ourselves can help us feel better
- ▶ Talking to someone we trust will assist maintain positive mental health and reduce anxiety
- ▶ Mindfulness' and gratitude exercises
- ▶ Learning to recognize when we need extra self-care
- ▶ Identify strategies work and when we need outside help

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Stress

- ▶ Tension we feel within our body in response to changes in our lives
- ▶ A little stress can be good, can give us focus and motivation
- ▶ Too much leaves us on high alert, and unable to switch off



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Depression

- ▶ Low mood which lasts for a long time
- ▶ Can be mild, where mood is constantly low
- ▶ Severe where you think life is not worth living
- ▶ You don't enjoy doing things that used to bring you joy
- ▶ You feel sad and hopeless
- ▶ Feeling tearful



DEPRESSION

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Symptoms of Depression

Experiencing 5 or more of the following symptoms for >2 weeks may indicate a depressive disorder



Feeling sad, guilty
or helpless



Reduced sense of
self-worth



Loss of interest in
activities



Insomnia or
excessive sleeping



Digestive problems



Physical aches



Changes in weight
or appetite



Trouble focusing and
making decisions



Restlessness



Pessimism



Irritability



Suicidal thoughts or
attempts

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Symptoms of Anxiety



Feeling nervous,
restless or tense



A sense of impending
doom, danger or panic



Increased heart rate



Hyperventilation



Increased sweating



Weakness or lethargy



Trembling



Trouble focusing



Gastrointestinal
problems



Having the urge to
avoid triggers

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DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Depression and anxiety have different characteristic symptoms, though some do overlap.



Depression Symptoms

- Guilt
- Loss of Interest
- Sadness
- Excess Sleepiness
- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite
- Lack of concentration

Anxiety Symptoms



- Restlessness
- Sweating
- Irritability
- Unwanted thoughts
- Feeling of impending doom
- Insomnia
- Excessive Worry

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Anxiety

- ▶ Anxiety can affect any of us, in different ways and at different times, whereas stress can come and go according to changes in the cause (e.g. work, relationship or money problems). Anxiety can persist; whether you know the cause or not. It can make you imagine that things in your life are worse than they really are, and can prevent you from confronting your fears - you might even think you're going mad. However, it's important to realise that anxiety is normal and is part of your body's protective system.
- ▶ Everyone has an internal alarm system that's designed to protect you from danger. It enhances your alertness by giving you a boost of adrenaline. This increases your heart rate and the amount of oxygen going to your limbs (in caveman times, this was designed to help people to either fight, freeze or flee from danger). It's also the cause of the 'butterflies in the stomach' feeling that's often associated with anxiety. The anxiety response caused by adrenaline can be triggered in everyday situations when stress has built up, often unknowingly.

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What Causes Anxiety

- ▶ While everyone will feel anxious from time to time, there are many reasons why someone might experience anxiety which is more severe and goes on for longer:
- ▶ **Stressful life events** - such as bereavement, relationship problems, ill health, losing your job, working under pressure for long hours, money worries or having a baby, particularly when events happen at the same time or are ongoing for a number of years.
- ▶ **Personality types** - some people who are naturally more cautious, analytical or thoughtful, for example, may be more likely to worry and experience anxiety.
- ▶ **A traumatic or difficult life experience** - when someone experiences a life-threatening or frightening danger (especially during childhood) or experiences like bullying or harassment.
- ▶ **Early experiences** (particularly under the age of three) - children who experience fear of danger more often, don't feel protected or encouraged or who experience disruption like illness, their parents' separation or moving schools - are more likely to feel anxiety as adults. A child who sees a parent constantly worrying may learn that behaviour and worry more as an adult.
- ▶ Some symptoms of anxiety or low mood can have an **underlying physical health cause** including problems like thyroid dysfunction, too little or too much calcium, severe vitamin B12 deficiency and severe anaemia. They can also be part of another issue such as depression or psychosis.

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Why We Suffer Anxiety - Fight or Flight

- ▶ Have you ever been woken in the night by a noise and sat bolt upright, fully alert with your heart pounding, ready to react to a possible danger? If you'd woken up feeling relaxed, you wouldn't have been prepared to cope with the threat you might be about to face.
- ▶ Anxiety is part of a primitive human response known as '**Flight or fight**' which helps us deal with sudden or short-term dangers. It evolved millions of years ago when early humans often met life-threatening dangers. Faced with a saber-toothed tiger being able to run away or fight was then vital to our survival.
- ▶ The response is triggered as soon as the brain becomes aware of a threat. Hormones called adrenaline and cortisol are then released into the bloodstream, increasing blood pressure to help us react quickly and create more energy for running. Bodily systems which are not essential during a life or death situation including the digestive, immune and reproductive systems are less active.

Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

- ▶ Shortness of breath
- ▶ Feelings of 'butterflies' in the stomach
- ▶ Increase in heartrate
- ▶ Palpitations
- ▶ Hot flushes
- ▶ Increase perspiration/sweaty palms
- ▶ Feelings of nausea
- ▶ Wanting to go to the toilet more often
- ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Shaking
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Dry mouth
- ▶ Blushing



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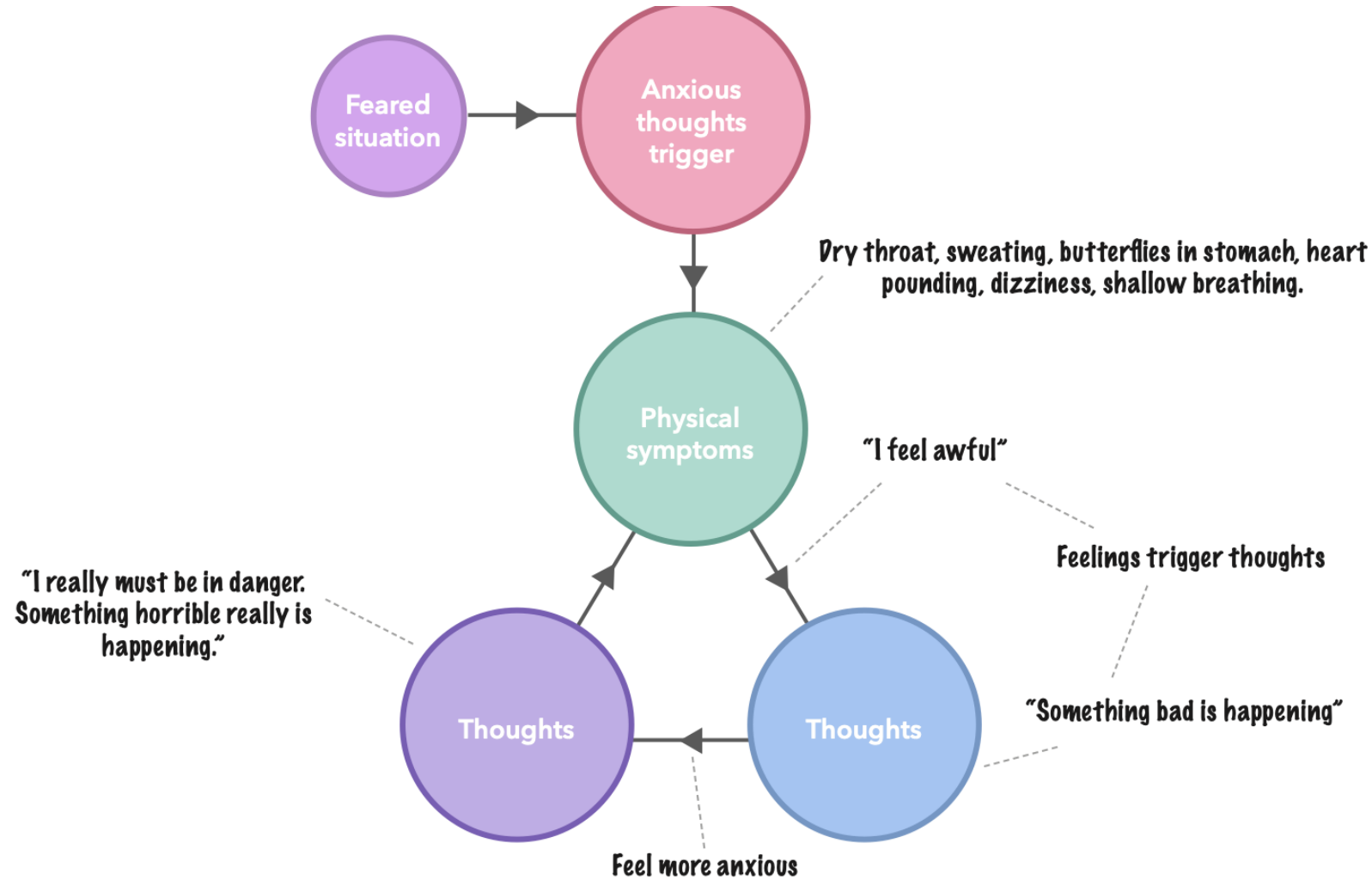
Psychological Symptoms of Anxiety

- ▶ You might lose control and/or go ‘mad’; or you might die
- ▶ You might have a heart attack/be sick/faint/have a brain tumour
- ▶ People are looking at you and noticing your anxiety
- ▶ Things are speeding up/slowing down
- ▶ You’re detached from your environment and the people in it
- ▶ You want to run away/escape from the situation
- ▶ You’re on edge and alert to everything around you



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Cycle of Anxiety



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Resolving & Reducing Anxiety

- ▶ By recognising that your symptoms are a result of feelings of anxiety, it can be a really valuable step in helping you begin to be able to manage them.
- ▶ When we experience physical symptoms without being able to attribute them to anything, this can actually lead to increasing levels of anxiety as we can become concerned that these are a sign of a serious medical condition, rather than linked to our mental well-being.
- ▶ If you are experiencing anxiety or panic and find yourself with any of the above physical symptoms, reassure yourself that these are completely normal and experienced by many others.



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Recovering from Anxiety

- ▶ You might know the cause of your anxiety: a traumatic incident, extreme stress or a challenging event (moving house, getting divorced, surgery etc). However, you might be able to identify the cause, which could bring you more distress.
- ▶ One approach to controlling your anxiety is to imagine your stress levels as being like a bucket of water. If you keep adding stressful issues to the bucket (even tiny ones like the school run or commuting to work), it will gradually fill up and will one day overflow. This explains why anxiety can sometimes seem to come from out of the blue, with no significant trigger.
- ▶ A very small issue might be the trigger that makes your bucket overflow and tips you over the edge. What you need is a leaky bucket, with lots of holes to reduce your overall stress levels. Each of these holes could be something positive that you do to manage your anxiety - such as yoga, exercise, reading, listening to music, spending time with friends or family and accessing therapy/support.

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Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is the feeling of being anxious about almost everything for no apparent reason. If you're affected by GAD, you'll often feel unduly worried about a wide variety of issues (such as health, money, work, school and relationships) rather than one specific problem. While most of us worry or feel anxious at some point in our lives, if you have GAD, you'll find it particularly difficult to control your worries. Your feelings of anxiety are more persistent and can often begin to affect your daily life.
- ▶ **Social anxiety (social phobia)**
- ▶ People with social anxiety experience fear about social situations and can worry constantly about what other people think about them. Social anxiety is very common and can have a big impact on a person's day-to-day life.
- ▶ People with health anxiety worry constantly about their health. This worry becomes overwhelming and can cause great distress. Some people with this disorder have a medical condition which they worry about. Others worry about certain symptoms which they fear are a sign of ill health or worry about conditions they might get in the future.
- ▶ People with panic disorder experience sudden and very intense responses to fear, known as panic attacks. Panic symptoms can build up quite suddenly in situations that cause the person overwhelming feelings of terror. This can happen even though there may not be an immediate danger in reality.
- ▶ <https://youtu.be/BVJkf8luRjE>

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Phobia

- ▶ A phobia is a fear of a specific thing. This can be a situation, place, object, feeling, place or animal. Common phobias include a fear of:
 - ▶ Birds or spiders.
 - ▶ Heights.
 - ▶ Travelling in lifts.
 - ▶ Visiting the dentist or having an injection.
 - ▶ Going out into a social place like a supermarket (known as Agoraphobia).
 - ▶ People with a phobia have an overwhelming fear about this situation or object which can cause them intense distress or feelings of panic. This can lead them to avoid the thing causing them this fear making their anxiety even greater.

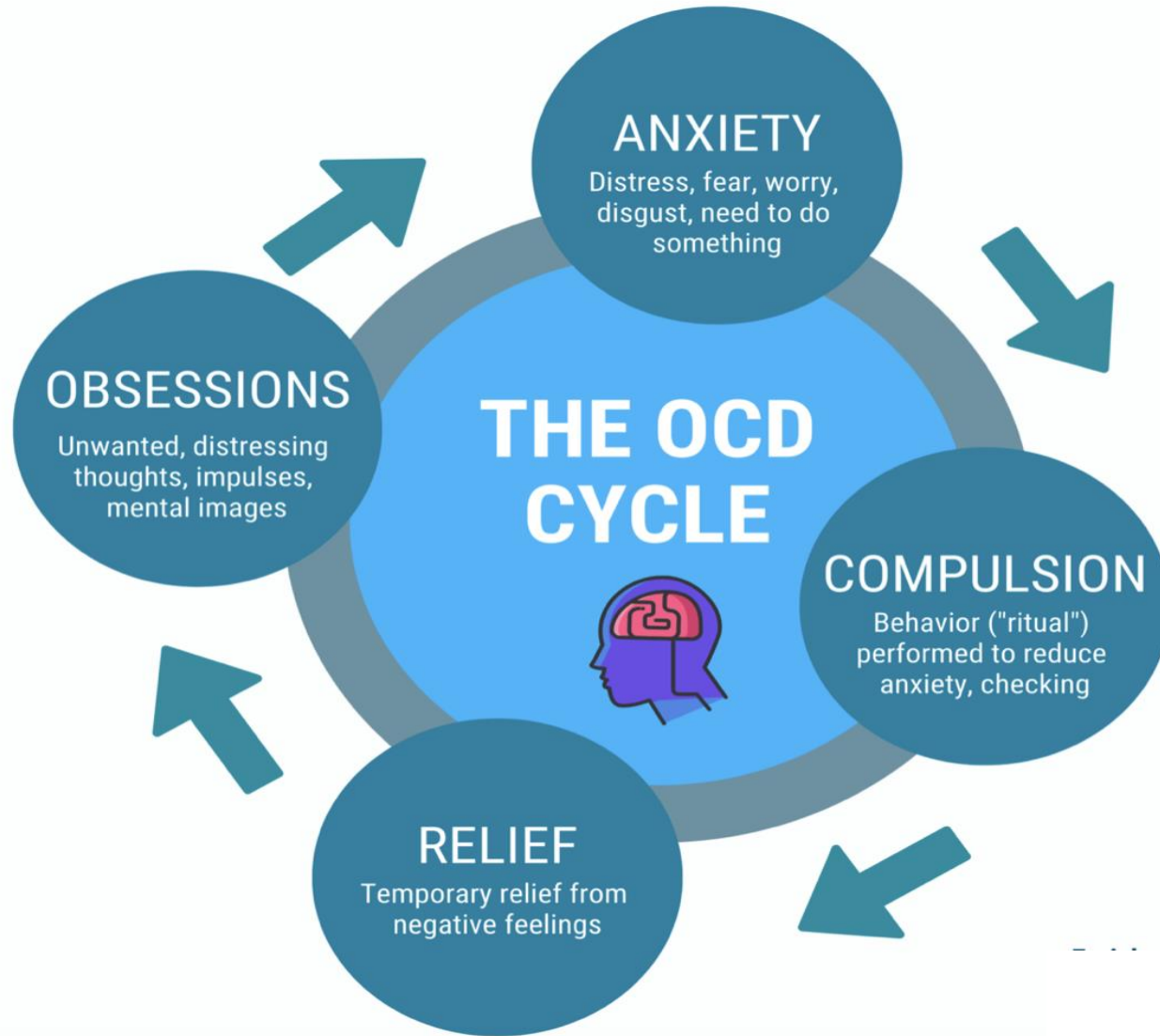
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Anxiety & OCD

- ▶ **Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)**
- ▶ **OCD** is a disorder where people perform repetitive actions (compulsions) to relieve the anxiety caused by certain negative thoughts, worries or doubts which repeatedly appear (obsessions). Compulsions can be things like washing hands, checking a door is locked or cleaning the house. A person with OCD may repeatedly perform these activities in order to stop certain things they fear from happening.



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Sources of Support

- ▶ Find out how you can start to tackle anxiety and learn helpful tools and techniques which can help you feel better soon:
- ▶ Challenge anxious thoughts
- ▶ Take control of worrying
- ▶ Face your fears
- ▶ Look after your physical health
- ▶ Take time to relax
- ▶ Be mindful
- ▶ Sleep better



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