

Anxiety

GP 10 minute intervention

1. Explain that this is a very common problem (helps to normalise it).
2. Check for underlying issues (eg past or recent trauma, bereavement, etc). If specific cause found, suggest counselling: www.talk2gether.nhs.uk/ (NHS); www.chtc.co.uk (private).
3. If no specific cause identified, explain: It's a 'whole body' experience, not just a 'brain thing'. The brain thinks there must be something to be anxious about because it misinterprets the physical changes in the body (ie rush of adrenaline, muscle tension, etc).
4. Get patient to ask themselves "What is the worst that really could happen?" – In many situations the honest answer is "Nothing that bad".

Effective treatment for most people:

1. Focused relaxation in the form of deep breathing. Show patient how to breathe in deeply to the base of the lungs and exhale slowly. Inhale to the count of about 4 and exhale more slowly to the count of 6. Practise this in groups of 3, at least 4 times daily. Rarely, but occasionally, patients feel more anxious doing this exercise, if this happens then stop.
2. Establish a 'safe place'. This requires the patient to think of a place, preferably outside and alone, where they feel peaceful or safe. This place can be from any time in their lives, eg childhood, on holiday, countryside or seaside, etc. If they cannot think of a place then they can create one in their imagination. The important thing is that it is easily brought to mind so that it can be repeated. Ask patient to describe the place in great detail, and include:

Where are you?

What can you see?

Are you sitting or standing?

What time of day is it?

What colours can you see?

What can you hear?

What can you taste?

What can you feel?

What happens to your feelings of anxiety when you do this exercise? Imagine this scene as a postcard or film that you can step into many times a day. Practise using it until it feels easy, then you can use it when you begin to feel anxious. You will notice its calming effects.