Anxiety is having the experience of strong and/or frequent stress, anxiety or fear. Anxiety is when these feelings of stress or fear are ongoing and happen without a reason or cause, having a severe impact on an individual’s daily functioning and making it very difficult to cope. For those experiencing an anxiety disorder, these feelings of worry and stress are very difficult to control. There are numerous types of anxiety disorders, including Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), phobias, social phobia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Panic Disorder.

**Symptoms from the Four Levels**

Anxiety has many different symptoms. These symptoms can affect individuals in many ways and have an effect on their daily functioning.

**Biological**

In anxiety sufferers, the fight or flight response is much more active. Some research also suggests there are genetic markers for vulnerability to anxiety disorders. When an individual is experiencing a panic attack, the biological symptoms of anxiety can sometimes resemble a heart attack, with sufferers feeling chest pain, dizziness, heart palpitations, hot flushes and sweating. Other symptoms can include:

- Nausea
- Insomnia
- Trembling
- Muscle Tension
- Trembling
- Headaches

**Basic Processes**

Basic Processes are psychological processes that are universal amongst humans. On the Basic Processes level, anxiety sufferers often experience interpretation bias where they perceive information from others as negative and directed towards themselves. Often memory is impaired due to inattention to tasks.

Other symptoms can include:

- Magnifying threats and failures
- Having fearful and worrisome thoughts
- Persistent and unwanted thoughts
- Hypersensitive to criticism
- Worried about potential mistakes
- Irrational fears

**Person**

Assertiveness training can help individuals who have anxiety due to lack of confidence in the workplace, at home or in social situations. It is a very ethical treatment with minimal risk involved, often including role playing exercise conducted with “I” statements. However, individuals can find the therapy intimidating which may make the anxiety worse, and it is not relevant if the cause of anxiety is not in the work place.

**Socio-Cultural**

Socio-cultural treatments are treatments external the self, and the most common is support groups. It is recognised that positive results arise when individuals belong to a recognised support group for anxiety. Feelings of belonging are promoted as members discuss comparable issues and build networks as they discuss their illness and hear other people’s stories. However, for members who have experienced traumatic events, it can be triggering or overwhelming to have to take part in discussions about abuse or trauma.

**Seeking Advice or Help?**

Beyond Blue 24/7 Helpline - 1300 22 4636
https://www.beyondblue.org.au/
Lifeline 24/7 Helpline - 13 11 14
https://www.lifeline.org.au/

**Figure One**: Persistant and unwanted thoughts that can magnify threats and failures are a symptom from the Basic Processes level.
The Person level includes individual differences in behaviour, including past experiences, personality type, gender, age, beliefs and stress management skills. Women are more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders than men, however it is believed this is due to women being more prone to seek help and report their experiences with anxiety compared to men.

Other symptoms can include:
- Unable to cope
- Not confident
- Focus on perceived threats
- High stress levels
- Neuroticism

The Socio-Cultural level involves symptoms external to the self. Individuals can develop anxiety disorders from traumatic events relating to their culture, political views or socio-economic status. Examples of these include war, poverty and abuse.

Other symptoms can include:
- Decreased job security
- Lack of family support
- Avoidance of groups
- Avoidance of social contact
- Social phobias

It is suggested that there is no one known cause for anxiety, rather risk factors that are present in one’s life and could cause an anxiety disorder to develop in an individual. Contrastingly, protective factors are factors present in one’s life that reduce the likelihood of an individual developing anxiety.

**BIOLOGICAL RISK FACTORS**
- Prematurity
- Low birth weight and birth injury
- Disability
- Prenatal brain injury

**BASIC PROCESSES RISK FACTORS**
- Poor problem solving
- Insecurity
- Low-intelligence
- School failure

**PERSON RISK FACTORS**
- Impulsivity
- Low-self esteem
- Poor social skills
- Poor attachment to school

**SOCIO-CULTURAL RISK FACTORS**
- Teenage mothers
- Family violence and disharmony
- Long term parental unemployment
- Father absence
- Large family size/less than two years between siblings

**PROTECTIVE FACTORS**
- Good physical health

**PROTECTIVE FACTORS**
- Above average intelligence
- Problem-solving ability
- Self-related cognitions
- Sense of belonging/bonding
- Responsibility and required helpfulness

**PROTECTIVE FACTORS**
- A strong cultural identity and ethnic pride
- Good social skills
- Attachment to family
- Moral beliefs
- Positive values
- Good coping style

**PROTECTIVE FACTORS**
- Supportive, caring parents
- More than two years between siblings
- Secure and stable family
- Involvement with a significant other person (partner/mentor)
- School norms against violence
- Economic security

**EFFECTIVE TREATMENTS FOR ANXIETY**

**** BIOLOGICAL ****

Electric Shock Therapy, also known as ECT, is a procedure used to treat severe mental illness. The process involves passing carefully controlled electric currents through the brain, which affects the brain's activity, and is only delivered by highly trained medical professionals. Modern day ECT is very safe and effective and can relieve the symptoms of severe forms of mental illness more effectively than medication or therapy alone. However, it is a highly intrusive and confronting procedure, and can cause memory problems due to changes in the brain, and should therefore only be used when absolutely necessary.

Another biological treatment for anxiety is medications. When used in conjunction with psychological therapies, medications are typically more successful in reducing mental illness. The most common type are benzodiazepines, a type of tranquilizer or sleeping pill to promote relaxation and reduce muscle tension. This is a biological treatment as it corrects the imbalance of chemical messages between nerve cells and the brain. Medication for anxiety is readily available in Australia, however these medications can become highly addictive, and as the dosage increases, as does the body's dependency on the medication.

**** BASIC PROCESSES ****

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a structured psychological treatment which recognises how the cognition and behaviour of an individual affects how they feel, helping the individual to change unhelpful or unhealthy habits of thinking, feeling and behaving. By making a client more aware of their thoughts and behaviours, they can start to make changes to improve coping skills. There is evidence for longer, more extended success, however treatments can be up to $200 a session and this is often not financially possible for some individuals.