Anxiety is defined by the American Psychological Association as ‘feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.’

The occasional feeling of stress or worry does not mean one has anxiety. This is a natural response to difficult situations. However, if these feelings persist at an uncontrollable and all-encompassing level for more than two weeks, you may have anxiety. You would not be alone, anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia; one-in-three women and one-in-five men will experience anxiety in their lifetime.

There are many different kinds of anxiety disorders, including Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

### WHAT IS ANXIETY?

**Assertiveness Training – Person**

Assertiveness Training can develop due to a lack of confidence, specifically in the workplace or social situations. A Assertiveness Training uses role playing exercises (using ‘I’ statements) to allow clients to become more assertive without displaying aggression. Following this, one generally shows a reduction in anxious thoughts and symptoms. This is a very risk-free treatment, however can be intimidating for sufferers. It is also not as widely known, though it is generally quite successful due to practical application.

**Support Groups – Socio-Cultural**

Often, talking to others with similar experiences can help to reduce anxiety, allowing sufferers to recognise that they are not alone in their struggles. Support groups provide an opportunity to share experiences and discuss coping strategies with others who have similar mental health issues in a safe and comforting environment. These can be conducted in person by contacting a local community health centre or online via several non-profit organisations. Though the use of support groups have many positives, such as gaining empowerment or hope, they might be difficult for those who lack confidence in social situations.

**IF THIS RAISES ANY CONCERNS:**

You can find a range of online resources at Beyond Blue:  
(www.beyondblue.com).  
Call: 1300 22 4636  
Chat Online: 3pm-2pm 7 Days  
Online Forums: 24 hrs, 7 days
There is evidence to suggest that there are anxiety-related genetic markets. An anxiety sufferer will experience a more active fight or flight response. They will often suffer headaches, dizziness, nausea, heart palpitations and hot flushing, amongst a range of other symptoms.⁶

Risk and Protective Factors
Many biological risk factors relate to the health of an individual, including prematurity, disability, chronic illness, poor health or physical impairment. In turn, the only real biological protective factor is to have good physical health.⁷

Person
Anxiety can relate to an individual’s past experiences, personality type and ability to cope with stress. Statistically, women are more likely to be diagnosed, however that does not necessarily mean anxiety is more common in women.¹¹ Sufferers will focus on perceived threats, lack confidence, experience high levels of stress and are often unable to cope with such stress.¹²

Risk and Protective Factors
Person risk factors relate to individual differences in personality, such as a difficult temperament, insecurities, poor social skills, low self-esteem and alienation. Protective factors are positive personality traits, including optimism, positivity, empathy and good social skills.¹³

Socio-cultural
Anxiety disorders can often develop following a traumatic event in a person’s life, such as a period of war, abuse or poverty.¹⁴ This can be effected by a lack of family support, decreased job security or environmental stressors, and can result in avoidance of groups or the development of social phobias.¹⁵

Risk and Protective Factors
There are many socio-cultural risk factors, including parental characteristics such as criminal behaviour or substance abuse, family environments in which there is violence or parental absence, life events including divorce, war, natural disaster, or the death of a loved one. Protective factors include supportive parents, a stable and secure family network, positive school environment, prosocial peer group and strong ethnic pride.¹⁶

Risk and Protective Factors
Risk factors include poor problem solving skills, beliefs about aggression and having a psychiatric disorder. Protective factors include above average intelligence, self-related cognitions and problem solving ability.¹⁰

Risk and Protective Factors
Anxiety can relate to other symptoms such as heart palpitations and hot flushing, amongst a range of other symptoms.⁸ They will magnify threats and failures, worry about potential mistakes, be hypersensitive to criticism and experience worrisome thoughts and irrational fears.⁹

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Risk and Protective Factors
Often, sufferers of anxiety will have ‘interpretation bias,’ perceiving harmless actions from others as negative towards themselves. Memory may be affected due to preoccupation with worry towards other stressors.⁸ They will magnify threats and failures, worry about potential mistakes, be hypersensitive to criticism and experience worrisome thoughts and irrational fears.⁹

Risk and Protective Factors
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There are a range of ways to treat anxiety, aiming to reduce or even eliminate anxiety-related symptoms.

Anti-Anxiety Medication – Biological
One of the most common anti-anxiety medications are Benzodiazepines, which are sometimes called minor tranquillisers or sleeping pills as they promote relaxation and reduce muscle tension within the body.¹⁷ These are effective in enabling sufferers to function more effectively in day-to-day life, though they should only be prescribed for a short time (generally only for a few weeks) as they can become addictive, and should not be the first or only treatment used.¹⁸

Anti-Depressant Medication – Biological
Sometimes, even if the sufferer is not displaying depressive symptoms, anti-depressant medication can be effective in managing anxiety. Studies have suggested chemical changes in the brains of anxiety sufferers, and as anti-depressant medication is designed to correct these imbalances, they can be quite effective when used to treat anxiety.¹⁹ Though medication options are readily available in Australia, some ‘trial and error’ is required in order to find the most effective medication and dosage for each individual.²⁰

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy – Basic Processes
CBT is a form of therapy that works to change one’s thoughts and behaviour to improve the way they feel. A therapist works with the patient to determine thought patterns which may be causing or intensifying their anxiety.²¹ For example, anxiety sufferers often experience ‘catastrophising’ thought patterns; thinking negatively and jumping to conclusions.²² By making the client more aware of their negative thoughts, they can work towards developing more favourable thoughts and behaviours. This is known to be one of the most effective treatment options, generally successful with all ages and demographics. However, it is generally difficult to change the thought processes of severe anxiety sufferers, and the lengthy process is quite expensive.²³