

Hints & Tips for dealing with Anxiety

March 2020

We are facing an unprecedented time of change and uncertainty. As more cases of COVID-19 continue to be announced we can expect to see higher levels of anxiety around the potential impact of the virus

Anxiety

Anxiety often stems from the unknown. Anxious people repeatedly ask themselves 'what if?' and focus on problems before they've happened. The lack of any precedent for dealing with a global pandemic means often there are no answers – only uncertainty

Anxiety however, can be just as contagious as a virus. We are social animals and it is important for us to pick up on how others are feeling. If one member of our group notices danger, it helps the group if others feel it too. However, high levels of anxiety for prolonged periods can lead to chronic stress – which is unhealthy and can have a negative impact on our physical and mental wellbeing

So what can we each do to identify potential signs of anxiety and then find help in order to relieve these symptoms?

Recognising the signs of Anxiety

Anxiety is characterised by a variety of symptoms which will be different and personal to each. Some people may have one or two symptoms, whereas others may have more. How severe these are, will vary by each individual

Excessive & Intrusive Worry

One of the most common symptoms of anxiety is excessive worry, it can impact concentration and short term memory, as well as the ability to do everyday tasks.

Examples include:

- Having a sense of dread/ fearing the worst or over thinking bad experiences
- Feeling disconnected from the world around you
- Feeling you can't stop worrying
- Worrying you are losing touch with reality
- Worrying that people are angry or upset with you

Agitation

This is our body responding to 'flight or fight' which is usually helpful, but it is not healthy as a response to anxiety over prolonged periods. Physical effects can include sweaty palms, hands shaking, racing pulse and a dry mouth

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Fatigue & Difficulty Sleeping

Anxiety can make you feel wiped out at various points of the day or you may feel exhausted after a panic attack. You may also have difficulty falling or staying asleep, which in turn impacts on feelings of tiredness

Agitation

Restlessness is experienced as 'feeling on edge' or having the 'uncomfortable urge to move'. Irritability also increases significantly with those with anxiety

Panic Attacks

These create intense overwhelming sensation of fear. Associated physical symptoms can include rapid heartbeat, shaking, sweating, shortness of breath, nausea, tightness of chest and fear of losing control/ dying.

If stress or anxiety is adversely impacting on your life, then you should always seek professional help.

Where can I find help?

Internal Resources

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

If your company provides you with an EAP, they are there to support you through all of life's issues and problems including stress, anxiety, relationship advice, family issues and financial wellbeing. Contact HR to find out the details.

Virtual GP Services

More companies are providing virtual GP services as part of their benefits package. Contact HR to find out if you are provided with this.

External Resources

PsychologyMatters.Asia provides a directory of therapists and allows you to search by various criteria .

http://www.psychologymatters.asia/find_therapist/Hong_Kong/

MIND offer free & low cost services (sliding costs based on salary) via Zoom Facetime, telephone. They also have additional advice on a variety of topics. <https://www.mind.org.hk/>

Samaritans provides a 24 hour phone service where individuals can talk about anything that is impacting them <https://samaritans.org.hk/>

Putting the basics in place

Sleep Hygiene

Start with putting in some structure; where possible go to bed and get up at the same time every day.

Ensure exposure to blue light is limited in the hour prior to sleep.

Having restorative sleep helps with the ability to cope.

Diet

Eat as healthily as you can. Reduce your intake of sugar as much as possible as this can significantly impact anxiety and stress.

Support Network

Talk to either a close friend or family member where possible to let them know what is going on for you.

If you are not able to do the above try contacting one of the resource mentioned earlier such as the EAP, MIND or the Samaritans

Exercise

Do at least 20 minutes daily exercise. This can be simply going for a walk – try to do your exercise outside (if possible).

Be creative about your exercise, if you used to go to the gym, there are now plenty of on-line videos that you can follow.

Alcohol

Limit your use as much as possible as this can interrupt your sleep and can heighten your anxiety.

The 10 minute Rule

Do something every day for at least 10 minutes that you enjoy. This could be as simple as reading a book, having a relaxing bath, playing with your pets – this is personal to you.

Increase talk time

It is important for wellbeing and resilience to ensure connectivity *whilst* we are self-isolating. As remote workers, we will all face psychological hazards linked to loneliness and isolation. How we respond and deal with it may be different, However, we will all need some support from each other

So, we may need to talk each other more frequently than usual. At the same time we should be mindful that some colleagues could be more vulnerable than others and need greater support – for example if they have recently suffered a bereavement or a relationship breakdown, they may be under financial stress, or they could be worried over their medical supplies for an underlying health condition

If you are talking to a colleague and they sound anxious, what should you do? If you feel comfortable, then you could:

- **ASK** how they are feeling, and how they are coping
- **LISTEN** to what they say
- **ENCOURAGE** them and try not to be judgemental
- **REASSURE** them that help is available and point them in the right direction

We do not expect everyone to become mental health experts, but we would like to think that we can support each other and signpost the support and resources available

Remember – You need to look after your own wellbeing before you are able to support others and we are in this together!

Additional Resources

Putting in the basics is the first step. In addition there are activities that some individuals have said have helped when feeling anxious, such as games & puzzles to distract themselves, breathing exercises & meditation to help lessen the feelings of anxiousness. Below are some apps that you may find helpful.

Anti Stress Anxiety Relief Game

Provides games that are relaxing

Headspace: Meditation

Provides meditations to help with stress relief, breathing and focus

Thrive

Helps you prevent and manage stress, anxiety & related conditions

Calm

Meditations and tools to improve sleep

Stress & Anxiety Companion

Breathing exercises, relaxing music and games designed to calm the mind

My possible self: the mental health app

Helps you to take control of your thoughts, feelings & behaviour. With modules to manage fear, anxiety, stress & tackle unhelpful thinking

About us

Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing work with clients of all sizes – both in Hong Kong and globally - to provide dedicated employee benefits & wellbeing consultancy. We've won many industry awards for our work and are widely recognised for our innovative and creative approach to benefit design.

We remain committed to supporting clients and the wider HR community during these challenging times. If you want to know more or simply to have a chat about ways you can support your employees, please get in touch with your consultant or contact us:

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