

Getting help

Treatments and strategies

If anxiety is impacting your daily life, reach out and seek help.

Talk to your GP or Māori hauora/health provider.

Have a check-up to rule out any physical cause for your symptoms. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist, e.g. a psychologist, counsellor, cognitive-behavioural therapist or other mental health service.

Medication. Your GP may prescribe medication, along with other strategies for managing anxiety. Talk about what is right for you. It is very important that you don't suddenly stop taking medication without your doctor's advice.

Talking Therapy can be very helpful. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) helps you learn about the links between your situation, physical sensations, and your thoughts and beliefs. It teaches ways to change unhelpful thought patterns.

If you find therapy unhelpful, try a different form of therapy and a different therapist - it can take time to connect with someone who is right for you.

In addition, you may consider **rongoā** or other traditional medicines that you connect to.

Peer support. Support groups can connect you with others who have similar experiences. Many find they are a key part to their wellbeing. Find support group listings here: [mentalhealth.org.nz/groups](https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/groups)

Connect with others



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Keep learning

Educate yourself about anxiety and strategies that can help. **Healthify.nz** and the 'understanding anxiety' section at **depression.org.nz** are good sources of information. Find books and more at your library.

Digital tools

Use the tools and support programmes available online to learn more and help you manage your symptoms: Visit **smallsteps.org.nz**, **aroawellbeing.co.nz**, **thelowdown.co.nz**, or **justathought.co.nz**

Try breathing, sleep or mindfulness apps on your phone.

Helplines

Talking through problems with a trained professional can help.

- Call or txt 1737 to speak to a trained counsellor.
- Anxiety Helpline: 0800 269 438 (0800 ANXIETY)
- More helplines can be found at: [mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines](https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines)

Resources

The Mental Health Foundation has a range of information on mental health and wellbeing including pamphlets, postcards and posters available to order for free: shop.mentalhealth.org.nz

Find us online

To find out more about our work, visit:

- ✉ resource@mentalhealth.org.nz
- 🌐 www.mentalhealth.org.nz
- 📷 [mhfnz](https://www.instagram.com/mhfnz)
- 📘 [mentalhealthfoundationNZ](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthfoundationNZ)

Help us to help others

The Mental Health Foundation is a charity and we rely on donations to support our work. Visit www.mentalhealth.org.nz to find out more.

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Anxiety and how to manage it



 **Mental Health Foundation**
OF NEW ZEALAND
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Our vision: a society where all people flourish.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a very common experience. We all get anxious or fearful from time to time in stressful situations, and that's completely normal.

As humans we are 'hardwired' to experience fear so that we can act instinctively (quickly and without thought) when we are threatened or in danger. This survival response focuses the mind and prepares the body for action (to fight, run away, or freeze). It is our brain's way of protecting us.

But when those feelings come when there is no danger present, or when they are overwhelming or go on for a long time, you may be experiencing an anxiety disorder.

How can anxiety affect you?

The feelings associated with anxiety can range from being a bit uneasy to a deep sense of dread, or feeling panicky and frightened. They affect both the tinana/body and the hinengaro/mind or our thoughts. When you are anxious, you may:

- feel wound up, restless, nervous or worried
- have a racing heart, feel tight in the chest or sick to your stomach, breathless or exhausted
- have trouble sleeping
- be unable to think clearly or concentrate
- worry a lot about money, your health, whānau/family or work, even when there are no signs of trouble
- be unable to relax, enjoy quiet time, or be by yourself
- avoid activities like meeting friends & whānau, or travel

If your anxiety impacts your quality of life, or you feel unable to cope, you should speak to a health professional. There is help available for you.

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorders are very common: about one in every seven adults in Aotearoa is affected by this condition (2021/22). There are a number of diagnoses of anxiety disorders, including:

- generalised anxiety
- separation anxiety
- selective mutism
- agoraphobia
- specific phobia
- social phobia
- panic disorder

Anxiety disorders are treatable. Find out more on the back page of this pamphlet.

Panic attacks

A panic attack is a sudden and intense episode of anxiety. Physical symptoms like a racing heart can make people feel like they are about to die, collapse or lose control of their minds. These frightening thoughts intensify the panic.

Panic attacks are common. They are not life-threatening, even if it can feel like it.

What can you do when you experience a panic attack? Focus on slowing down your breathing, particularly the exhale. Try the following: breathe in for a count of 3, hold for a count of 1, breathe out for 4 (pushing the air out with your stomach). Remember these feelings and sensations will pass.

Let people in your life know what's going on for you, so they can support you in the moment.

Managing anxiety: self help

There are things you can do that help. Look at the treatment options on the back page, and the self-care tips below. With support, you can come to a place where your anxiety is manageable and you can live well.

- **Breathe.** When you feel anxious, breathe slowly and deeply. Try belly breathing - place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. When you breathe in your stomach should push out, not your ribs. Make this style of breathing a habit.
- **Talk** to friends and whānau about how you are feeling and share your thoughts with them.
- **Stay active** - walk, cycle, run, play sports, dance, garden or do regular exercise that you enjoy.
- **Connect** with cultural activities such as waiata/singing, dancing, kapa haka or crafts. Belonging and connection help with your wellbeing.
- **Relax** regularly. Try a relaxation CD or app, meditation or yoga. Go for a walk in the park and watch the birds.
- **Sleep** is the most important form of relaxation, so try to establish a regular sleep routine.
- **Self-help** books, apps and websites are usually based on cognitive techniques, which can be helpful. Read what has helped others with their anxiety.
- **Avoid** substances that make anxiety and panic worse, such as caffeine, alcohol and cannabis.

Quick tips and tricks

Try these strategies when things get difficult:

Question: How realistic is this worry?

Talk it out: Share with someone you trust.

Write it out: Put it on paper. That puts it in perspective.

Shrug it off: Raise your shoulders, and then drop them. Relax your whole body.

Breathe it away: Inhale deeply and exhale with a sigh. Do this a few times. Let your tension go as you breathe.

Set an 'appointment with worry': Take 15 minutes to concentrate on your worry. This can help you let go of the worry the rest of the time.

Work it off: Do something physical. Give your tension an outlet.

Distance it: Imagine it a few years from now. How much will it matter then?

Balance it: Find a good side as well as the bad.

Let it go: Picture a river. Now picture placing each worry on a leaf as it floats by on the water.

Let it pass: Notice how you're feeling without judgment, remind yourself it will pass and you will be ok.

Make it positive: Surround yourself with happy colours and sounds. Remember your strengths.

Relax regularly

