
Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Patient Treatment Manual

This manual is both a guide to treatment and a workbook for persons who suffer from generalized anxiety disorder. During treatment, it is a workbook in which individuals can record their own experience of their disorder, together with the additional advice for their particular case given by their clinician. After treatment has concluded, this manual will serve as a self-help resource enabling those who have recovered, but who encounter further stress or difficulties, to read the appropriate section and, by putting the content into action, stay well.

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Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety Disorders
St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney.

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Section 1

About this programme

This programme will aim to teach you to manage your worry and anxiety by learning to change the way you think and the way you react to your thinking and other events. In essence you will be learning new methods of control.

It is important to realize that achieving control of worry and anxiety is a skill that has to be learnt. To be effective, the skill must be practiced regularly and you will need to take responsibility for change. The more you put into the programme, the more you will get out of it. It is not the severity of your anxiety, or how long you have been anxious, or how old you are that predicts the success of this programme, but rather it is your motivation to change your reactions.

What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

Generalized anxiety disorder is a disorder that is characterized by persistent feelings of anxiety and worry. The worry is typically out of proportion to the actual circumstances, it exists through most areas of a person's day-to-day life, and is experienced as difficult to control. The anxiety and worry is described as generalized, as the content of the worry can cover a number of different events or circumstances, and the physical symptoms of anxiety are not specific and are part of a normal response to threat.

Individuals with generalized anxiety disorder describe themselves as sensitive by nature and their tendency to worry has usually existed since childhood or early adolescence.

The symptoms of anxiety typically experienced by individuals with generalized anxiety disorder are

- feeling restless, keyed up, or on edge
- being easily tired
- having difficulty concentrating, or having your mind going blank
- feeling irritable
- having tense, tight or sore muscles
- having difficulty sleeping; either difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless unsatisfying sleep.

Generalized anxiety disorder is one of the more common anxiety disorders in the community. A recent Australian survey has suggested that, in a 12 month period, 3 in 100 people will have a generalized anxiety disorder.

Generalized anxiety disorder and everyday worry.

Everybody worries or gets anxious at some time in their lives. The worry in generalized anxiety disorder is identical in nature to that experienced by anybody else, but it tends to be out of proportion, pervasive, and difficult to control, unlike the worry most people experience. Hence it significantly interferes with an individual's functioning. The constant anxiety-provoking thinking and the accompanying physical symptoms of anxiety can be disabling, particularly if experienced over a long period of time.

Another feature of generalized anxiety disorder is that it has usually been present for much of an individual's life. From time to time, people may become unusually stressed, because of a physical illness or a life event such as divorce, bereavement, or loss (or threat of loss) of employment. During these times people may worry and become significantly more anxious, but after the stress resolves, the person can usually return to their usual functioning. This is not generalized anxiety disorder, but a temporary period of difficulty adjusting to stress.

Medication

You may be taking medication to help you cope with anxiety. If you are taking medication, you may need to talk about the issues discussed below with your therapist.

Antidepressant medication

Many of the medications that are useful to treat a depressive disorder are also useful to help control anxiety. If your doctor has prescribed you this type of medication, particularly if you have been depressed, it is important that you continue to take the medication for several months, and only stop taking it in consultation with your doctor. This medication typically has few side-effects, it is safe, and will not cause you to build up tolerance or become dependent.

When you are ready to stop this medication (usually after you have been feeling calm and in control for a number of months), it is very unlikely that you will experience a relapse of your anxiety if you have been able to learn and put into practice the strategies taught on this programme.

Sedatives, tranquilizers and sleeping pills.

This class of medication is the benzodiazepines. They dampen the feelings of anxiety very effectively, but also produce the following problems:

- they can interfere with thinking and your ability to remember new information;
- they can make you feel drowsy and sleepy;
- they can interfere with your natural sleep cycle and rhythms;
- they can produce tolerance, so that you might need bigger and bigger doses for the same effect;
- they can produce dependence, so that you come to rely on them and experience an increase in anxiety without them;

- they can produce withdrawal symptoms when you stop or cut down, producing unpleasant anxiety-like symptoms;
- they can make it easier for you not to use the strategies taught in this programme.

If you are taking this type of medication would already have been asked to gradually cut down, with the aim to stop completely. If you are experiencing any difficulties with this process, please discuss it with your therapist who can then work with your doctor in achieving the goal of successfully stopping the medication.

Section 2

The Nature of Anxiety and Worry

The Nature of Anxiety.

Anxiety is a normal and healthy reaction. It describes a series of changes in the body, and in the way we think and behave, that enable us to deal with threat or danger; changes that can be very useful if you have to respond very quickly.

Consider the following:

You are crossing a wide and busy road at a pedestrian crossing. You suddenly notice a truck that has failed to slow down and will probably not stop, and it is heading in your direction. You start running for the safety of the sidewalk some meters away. The brain becomes aware of danger. Automatically, hormones are released and the involuntary nervous system sends signals to various parts of the body to produce the changes listed below.

- The mind becomes alert.
- Blood clotting ability increases, preparing for possible injury.
- Heart rate speeds up and blood pressure rises.
- Sweating increases to help cool the body.
- Blood is diverted to the muscles, which tense, ready for action.
- Digestion slows down.
- Saliva production decreases, causing a dry mouth.
- Breathing rate speeds up. Nostrils and air passages in lungs open wider to get in air more quickly
- Liver releases sugar to provide quick energy.
- Sphincter muscles contract to close the openings of the bowel and bladder.
- Immune responses decrease, which is useful in the short term to allow massive response to immediate threat, but can become harmful over a long period.

and so you are able to run very quickly to the side of the road and escape being knocked down by the truck.

As you can see, this series of reactions, known as the ‘fight or flight’ response, account for the many and varied feelings you can experience when you are anxious. In your mind you feel fear, apprehension, you are ‘on edge’, ‘keyed up’, and worried.

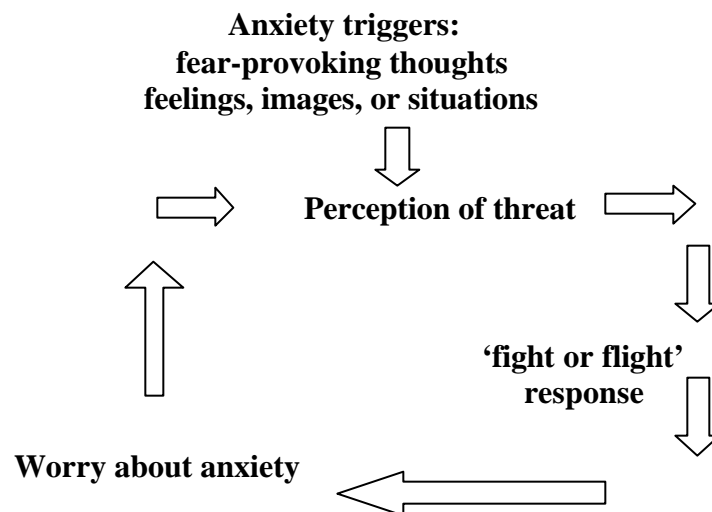
In your body, you may experience one or a number of the following sensations:

- *trembling or shaking*
- *restlessness*
- *muscle tension*
- *sweating*
- *shortness of breath*
- *pounding or racing heart*
- *cold and clammy hands*
- *fast breathing*
- *dry mouth*
- *hot flushes or chills*
- *feeling sick or nauseated*
- *“butterflies” in the stomach*

This ‘fight or flight’ response is useful in the short term, especially if the danger can be dealt with by physical exertion. But it is of no use in the long term and certainly of little use in most stressful situations today - it does not help to run when the traffic cop pulls you over and it doesn't help to fight physically when you are threatened by the boss. However, because the ‘fight or flight’ response was useful when, in the distant past we regularly had to deal with physical danger, it remains part of our physical make-up. It is no wonder that when we are threatened, we can't get enough air, our hearts pound, we feel nauseated, and our arms and legs tremble and shake, as all these responses would be useful if we could flee or fight.

The Anxiety Cycle

All of these changes in the body can be quickly reversed once vigorous physical activity has been carried out. This explains why many people report the desire to run or in some other way expend physical energy when placed in stressful situations. However, we are not often able to immediately engage in physical activity and therefore are less able to reverse the changes. For people who are prone to worry excessively, these changes can be quite disturbing and a new source of threat. This, of course, leads to further activation of the ‘fight or flight’ response and the whole cycle is continued.



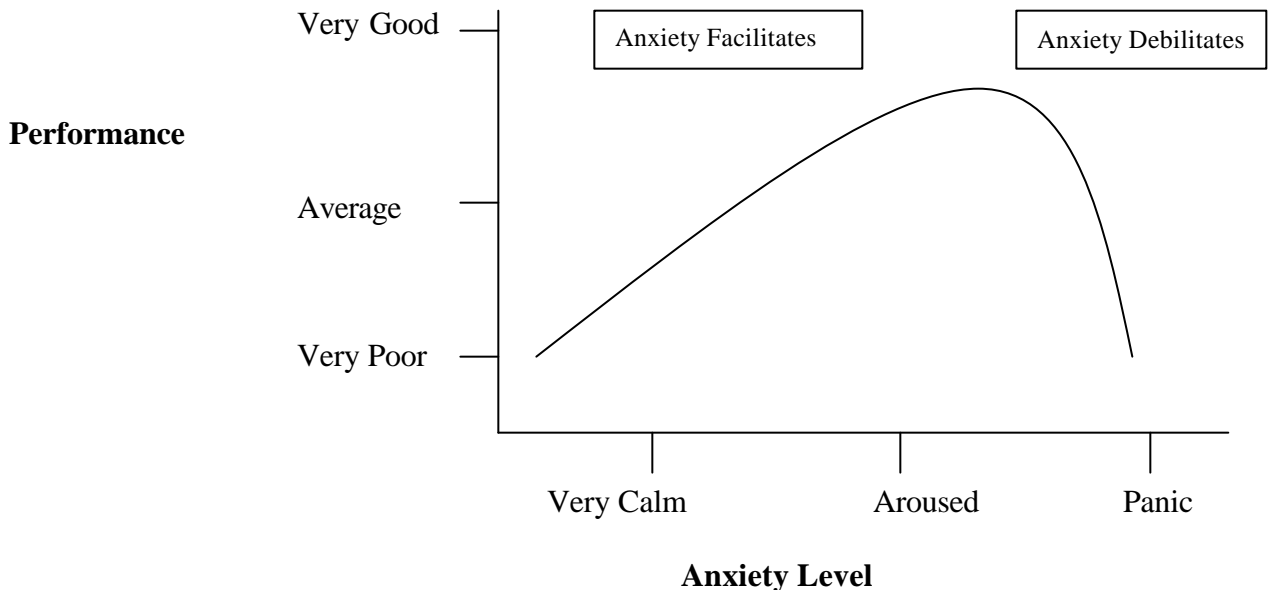
Anxiety and Performance

Anxiety can become a problem if it occurs in situations where there is no real danger. The only part of the 'fight or flight' response that is of use today when handling most stresses is the increase in mental alertness that it provides. It is very important to understand that while increased awareness can be helpful, anxiety in some situations can be unnecessary or inappropriate.

Anxiety helps you perform any skilled activity. If you are totally relaxed when you take an exam, play a sport, or discuss a problem with your colleagues, you will not give of your best. To do anything really well you need to be alert, anxious to do well, or "psyched-up" in present day terms. Anxiety in moderation is a drive that can work well to make you more efficient.

People with anxiety disorders often become afraid of the healthy anxiety that aids performance - they fear it might become uncontrollable and hence avoid using anxiety in this healthy way. Thus, they limit their ability to give of their best. This reaction is understandable, for if you don't know how to control anxiety, it is probably better to have too little than too much. When people do get too anxious, their skill at problem solving, managing the children, or meeting deadlines at work declines rapidly. Extreme anxiety interferes with the ability to think clearly and act sensibly. This, as everyone knows, is the sort of anxiety that robs us of our capacity to do things as well as we are able. In fact, the more difficult the task, the more important it is to manage anxiety carefully; ideally, one should be mildly anxious, alert, tense, and in control, for maximum efficiency.

The relationship between anxiety and skill is shown in the diagram.



It is, therefore, important to learn a strategies for remaining calm when appropriate, and alert, tense, and in control in difficult situations.

Chronic Anxiety

If individuals find it difficult to break the anxiety cycle, the problems can become chronic. It is very likely that individuals with generalized anxiety disorder have had long-standing difficulties with managing anxiety, sometimes for months or even years. Some of the results of feeling anxious over a long time include:

- *feeling restless or keyed up or on edge*
- *being easily tired*
- *difficulty concentrating or mind going blank*
- *irritability*
- *muscle tension*
- *trouble falling or staying asleep*
- *restless unsatisfying sleep*
- *feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope*
- *feeling depressed or demoralized*

When you experience these problems, the anxiety has begun to interfere with your everyday life. Because anxiety is a normal, *in-built*, and at times useful response, you will never banish it completely from your life, but the good news is that you can learn to manage and control it.

Why Do the Symptoms of Tension and Anxiety Begin?

The reason why you have become anxious is probably due to a combination of causes. We will briefly consider some possible causes.

The effect of personality

Personality refers to the usual way we react, feel, and behave year in and year out. Most people who seek treatment for an anxiety disorder have come to regard themselves as nervous, not just because of their high levels of anxiety, but because they consider themselves to be people who are usually sensitive, emotional, and worry easily. There are advantages to being like this, for the sensitivity means you can understand other people quickly and hence are often liked in return. It also probably means that you like to do things properly and treat other people well. But the emotionality and the proneness to worry are the seeds from which anxiety can grow.

The various strategies that we will teach you will aid you to control this aspect of your personality. If you do become upset and worry easily, then you'll need to become particularly expert in remaining alert, tense, but in control to prevent you becoming too anxious in the face of difficulties.

The effect of life events and stressors

Anxiety may begin at a time when you are experiencing a high level of stress. Throughout our lives, we are constantly adjusting to demands placed upon us by changing circumstances. Making an important decision, meeting a deadline, changing jobs or routines, dealing with others in our lives all require constant adjustments. However, at times you may experience a

single major problem, or several smaller problems, that may exceed your normal powers of adaptation. When high levels of stress occur, anxiety can result if they produce in you a sense of threat and lack of control.

The effect of your view of the world

Individuals with generalized anxiety disorder have an increased tendency - compared to individuals without an anxiety disorder - to automatically interpret information in their lives as threatening. For example, the ringing telephone is less likely to be considered with pleased anticipation of a friend ringing for a chat, but more likely to be viewed with alarm as news of an accident. Or a frown on the face of a supervisor at work is less likely to be viewed as the supervisor's personal problem, but more likely to be viewed as a sign of disapproval. This view of the world is thought to develop from previous life experiences, which might include the impact of stressful life events, or the messages received from parents and other important people in your life.

The Nature of Worry.

Worry is a central feature of generalized anxiety disorder. Most people can identify with the idea of 'worry', but scientists have defined the following features in the worry of individuals with generalized anxiety disorder:

- is usually a stream of thoughts or ideas;
- is accompanied by feelings of apprehension or anxiety;
- concerns future events and catastrophes;
- interferes with the ability to think clearly;
- is very difficult to control.

Research has shown that the typical person with generalized anxiety disorder can spend over half of their waking hours worrying. In most instances, the individual can recognize, with hindsight, that the worry was excessive and out of proportion to the actual event that triggered the worry.

A large number of worries tend to focus on day-to-day concerns, most typically:

- family and home life
- relationships
- work and study
- illness or injury
- finances

Common themes of worry in generalized anxiety disorder can include:

- problems arising in the future
- perfectionism and a fear of failure
- fear of being negatively evaluated by others

It is clear that individuals with generalized anxiety disorder largely worry about events that are remote (as opposed to in the immediate future) and which are unlikely to happen. This sort of worry is rarely helpful as it is unlikely to promote effective problem solving. For example,

worrying that a relative might develop a life-threatening illness (a remote and unlikely event) will not affect the likelihood of it happening. However adaptive worry might take place prior to an important exam if the worry led to a good problem-solving behaviour – a time-table of study.

Worry about worry

A second level of worry has been identified in individuals with generalized anxiety disorder and includes thoughts such as

- *“I can’t control my worry”*
- *“Worry is bad for me”*
- *“My worry will never end”*
- *“I will go mad with worry”*

These worries may increase the sense of threat and therefore symptoms of anxiety can rise even further.

Sometimes people come to believe that their worry might be useful. They might think

- *“If I worry about the worst possible outcome I can be better prepared for the worst possible outcome”*
- *“Worrying about an outcome will stop it from happening”*
- *“If I stop worrying and something bad happens, I’d be responsible”*
- *“I can sort it out if I keep worrying about it”*
- *“I’d have nothing to think about if I didn’t worry”*
- *“My worry helps me to keep control of my anxiety”*

But these beliefs are rarely confirmed, are rarely put to the test, and the individual continues to worry. If you hold any of these beliefs, it will be important to challenge them in order to be able to let go of the process of worry and its negative consequences. For example, if you did stop worrying about a particular event, will it really make it more likely to happen? But more about strategies to combat worry later.

Behaviours that can maintain worry and anxiety

A number of things you do to deal with the worry in the short-term may actually cause the anxiety and worry to continue in the longer-term.

- **Reassurance seeking**, or needing to check with others that things are going to be ok. For example, telephoning your partner frequently to make sure nothing bad has happened to them, or visiting your doctor any time you notice a sign or bodily sensation that might mean you are ill. Continually seeking reassurance from others might relieve the anxiety in the short-term, but the relief is usually only temporary. Because you are never really allowed to deal with the initial worry yourself, you can come to depend on this reassurance, and unfortunately come to need it more and more to relieve anxiety.

- Other forms of checking include obsessively reviewing the report for work or study to make sure that it is perfect, or not being able to take a break until all the tasks for the day are complete (and we all know how likely that goal is to be achieved!!). While there is not a lot of evidence that this type of checking ensures that work is perfect, or that everything gets done, the individual never learns that their work can be acceptable without the checking or that they can take breaks and still get things done. Instead, goals are set too high, and the individual becomes upset, anxious and demoralized when they don't achieve what they have planned.
- Avoidance of situations or events that are thought to produce anxiety. For example, avoiding listening to the news because stories of disasters or illness will trigger worry about personal disaster or illness. Or avoiding people because of what they might say to you. Or avoiding any situation in which the chances of danger have been overestimated.

Avoidance can seriously limit your life and the possibility of enjoying a range of activities that are so much a part of everybody's life. When avoidance is based on an overestimation of danger, it is unnecessary and the belief of danger is never disconfirmed.

- Procrastination, a special form of avoidance, which involves not beginning a task because of the anxiety associated with a possible negative outcome. Many times tasks are only started when the negative consequences of not starting outweigh the negative consequences associated with completing the task - some tasks never get started at all! For example, consider a dressmaker who can never start on special orders because of her fear that her client would not like the finished product and therefore think less of her both professionally and personally. In most cases, the feared consequences are overly negative, usually catastrophic, and not based on reality.
- Another form of avoidance is trying to suppress or control worry. Unfortunately, the worry might well be made stronger by attempts to suppress it, possibly just because you are purposefully focusing your attention on it. Some research has suggested that the process of deliberately suppressing thoughts can cause them to intrude into your mind more forcefully when the thoughts are no longer being actively suppressed. This process has been called a rebound effect.

Alternative strategies for dealing with worry that do not maintain the anxiety and worry are covered in later sections of the manual.

Keeping a record of your anxiety or worry

Identification of the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that contribute to anxiety is an important part of this programme. This information will help you and your therapist plan the best strategies to help you manage problems with generalized anxiety.

Monitoring progress also allows us to see what works well and what doesn't work so well, and so the plan can be adapted on that basis. The monitoring will also make sure that you are aware of the progress you are making, even if in small steps.

In particular we will be asking you to

- identify the content of your worry
- identify the beliefs you hold about worry (“worry about worry”)
- identify behaviours that may be maintaining your worry

Each time you have an episode of anxiety or worry we will be getting you to complete a **‘Record of Worrying Thoughts’** that is listed in the appendix of this manual.

Using the information in these records we will be able to identify:

- situations or circumstances that trigger worry or anxiety
- the situations that you avoid because of anxiety or worry
- behaviours in response to your worry

Record of worrying thoughts

Date: _____

Describe the situation	What triggered the worry?	Describe the worry	Describe worry about worry	What did you do?
		How did you feel:		How did you then feel:
		How strong was that feeling _____%		How strong was that feeling: _____%

Record of worrying thoughts

Date: _____

Describe the situation	What triggered the worry?	Describe the worry	Describe worry about worry	What did you do?
		How did you feel:		How did you then feel:
		How strong was that feeling _____%		How strong was that feeling: _____%

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		How strong was that feeling _____ %		How strong was that feeling: _____ %

Record of worrying thoughts

Date: _____

Describe the situation	What triggered the worry?	Describe the worry	Describe worry about worry	What did you do?
		How did you feel:		How did you then feel:
		How strong was that feeling _____%		How strong was that feeling: ____%

Section 3

De-arousal strategies

Control of hyperventilation.

If you are often troubled by the following symptoms when anxious or worried, you may be hyperventilating:

<i>Dizziness</i>
<i>light-headedness</i>
<i>Confusion</i>
<i>Breathlessness</i>
<i>blurred vision</i>
<i>feelings of unreality</i>
<i>numbness and tingling in the extremities</i>
<i>cold, clammy hands</i>
<i>stiffness in the muscles</i>
<i>tightness or pain in the chest</i>
<i>a fear that something bad is about to happen (e.g., a heart attack or loss of control over behavior)</i>

Hyperventilation is defined as a rate and depth of breathing that is too much for the body's needs at a particular point in time. A number of factors such as emotion, stress, or habit can cause us to increase our breathing. The most important effect of hyperventilation is that it produces a marked drop in carbon dioxide. Through complicated automatic mechanisms designed to restore the balance, a number of physical changes occur, resulting in a slight reduction in the levels of oxygen getting to various parts of the body, including the brain. Many people that over-breathe also tend to breathe with their chest muscles rather than their diaphragm, and these muscles therefore become tight and painful.

Hyperventilation is not dangerous. Increased respiration is an integral part of the 'fight or flight' response and so is part of a natural biological response aimed at protecting the body from harm. It is an automatic reaction for the brain to immediately expect danger and for the individual to feel the urge to escape. So, your perception of danger triggers hyperventilation and the 'fight or flight' response, but once this response is triggered, there is a natural tendency to begin to feel fearful and think anxious thoughts. This leads some people to fear physical harm from the symptoms of anxiety themselves.

Do you hyperventilate?

Many people are unaware that they hyperventilate. Their pattern of hyperventilation may be subtle, or they may be only focusing on one or two of the symptoms produced. To

assess whether or not you hyperventilate, you can (i) monitor your breathing, or (ii) deliberately hyperventilate to see what physical feelings are produced.

(i) Monitor your breathing.

For one minute (timed), count one breath in and out as 1, the next breath in and out as 2, and so on. It may be difficult at first, but don't try to change your breathing rate voluntarily. Time yourself for one minute and write the answer here: _____

Now consider the following:

Do you breathe too quickly? The average person only needs to take 10 to 12 breaths per minute at rest. If your rate of breathing is much greater than this (say 15 or more breaths per minute), then you must reduce it.

Do you breathe too deeply? Does your chest sometimes feel over-expanded? You should breathe from the abdomen and through the nose, consciously attempting to breathe in a smooth and light way.

Is your hyperventilation episodic (occurring only during episodes of high anxiety or depression), *or habitual* (occurring through much of the day)? Habitual over-breathing involves slight increases in depth or speed of breathing sustained over a long period. Generally, this is not enough to bring on a panic attack, but leaves the person always feeling apprehensive, slightly dizzy, and unable to think clearly.

(ii) Deliberately hyperventilate

Demonstrate for yourself what happens when you deliberately produce the physiological symptoms of hyperventilation. Really work hard to over-breathe, and stop when you experience symptoms in the first stage of hyperventilation. When you stop, concentrate on breathing very slowly until the feelings pass.

- What did you experience?
- Was it similar to what happens when you get anxious?
- How frightening was it?

See how you can deliberately produce this physiological reaction. See how quickly it goes away when you stop over-breathing. If you can produce this reaction you can also slow it down. But it takes practice.

Slow-Breathing Technique.

Do this before tackling a difficult situation, or any time when feeling tense or anxious.

- Hold your breath and count to 6 (don't take a deep breath).
- When you get to 6, breathe out and say the word "relax" to yourself in a calm, soothing manner.
- Breathe in and out slowly in a six-second cycle. Breathe in for three seconds and out for three seconds. This will produce a breathing rate of 10 breaths per minute. Say the word "relax" to yourself every time you breathe out. Breathe in a smooth and light manner.
- Make sure you breathe through your nose and use your abdomen rather than chest muscles.
- At the end of each minute (after 10 breaths) hold your breath again for 6 seconds and then continue breathing in the six-second cycle.
- Continue breathing in this way until all the symptoms of over-breathing have gone.

The more you practice this slow-breathing technique, the better you will become at using it to manage symptoms of hyperventilation. Sometimes you will notice that symptoms of anxiety return after a short while. That's okay, just do your controlled breathing again for as long as it takes to settle.

A small number of individuals report that they get symptoms of anxiety when they first start breathing retraining. This is probably due to breathing a little fast or becoming sensitive to breathing patterns when you think about them. Keep practicing and the anxiety will diminish.

Other people report that when they first begin to practice this slow breathing technique it feels unnatural. This is only to be expected if you have been habitually breathing at a higher rate, too shallowly, or in some other irregular fashion. As you practice the slow-breathing technique it will come to feel not only more natural, but also more comfortable.

At first, you may need to use a watch with a second hand to be sure that your rate is slow enough. With time, you will be able to judge the correct rate yourself, and hence be able to use this technique well even when you cannot watch a clock.

What Is Relaxation Training?

Relaxation is the voluntary letting go of tension. This tension can be physical tension in the muscles or it can be mental, or psychological, tension. When we physically relax, the impulses arising in the various nerves in the muscles change the nature of the signals that are sent to the brain. This change brings about a general feeling of calm, both physically and mentally. Muscle relaxation has a widespread effect on the nervous system and therefore should be seen as a physical treatment, as well as a psychological one. This section will discuss how to recognize tension, how to achieve deep relaxation, and how to relax in everyday situations. You will need to be an active participant in relaxation, committed to daily practice for two months or longer.

Importance of Relaxation Training

Part of the 'fight or flight' response involves the activation of muscle tension, which helps us perform many tasks in a more alert and efficient manner. In normal circumstances, the muscles do not remain at a high level of tension all the time but become activated and deactivated according to a person's needs. Thus, a person may show fluctuating patterns of tension and relaxation over a single day according to the demands of the day, but this person would not be considered to be suffering from tension.

When people have been anxious for long periods of time or when people have not taken time off from work or other activities, they seldom allow the muscle tension levels to become deactivated, and the tension tends to stay with them for longer and longer periods. Eventually, these people cannot recognize tension or are unable to relax the tension away. The tension no longer helps them perform their daily tasks, and may even hinder normal activities. Because of the tension, these people may feel jumpy, irritable, or apprehensive. This may be why many people often report feeling slightly unwell a lot of the time, with headaches or backaches, or they feel slightly apprehensive all the time, worrying about things unnecessarily. Constant tension can make people oversensitive and they respond to smaller and smaller events as though they were threatening. By learning to relax, it becomes easier to gain control over these feelings of anxiety.

Since some tension may be good for you, it is important to learn to discriminate when tension is useful and when it is unnecessary. Actually, much everyday tension is unnecessary. Only a few muscles are involved in maintaining normal posture, for example, sitting, standing, or walking. Most people use more tension than is necessary to perform these activities. Occasionally, an increase in tension is extremely beneficial. For example, it is usually helpful to tense up when you are about to receive a serve in tennis game. Likewise, it is probably helpful to tense up a bit before a job interview. This tension keeps you keen and alert. Do not become frightened of this type of tension.

The tension is unnecessary when:

- It performs no useful alerting function
- It is too high for the activity involved
- It remains high after the activating situation has passed

WHAT PHYSICAL CHANGES OCCUR DURING THE RELAXATION RESPONSE?

- *The mind becomes more tranquil*
- *Hormone production decreases*
- *Breathing rate decreases as less oxygen is needed*
- *Heart rate decreases and blood pressure drops*
- *Sweating decreases markedly*
- *Muscles relax*

Note that these responses are opposite to the 'fight or flight' response.

Components of Relaxation Training

In order to be more in control of your anxiety, emotions, and general physical well-being, it is important to be able to relax. To do this you need to:

- Recognize tension
- Relax your body in a general, total sense
- Let tension go in specific muscles

Recognizing Tension

When people have been tense and anxious for long periods, they are frequently not aware of how tense they are, even while at home. Being tense has become normal to them and may even feel relaxed compared with the times they feel extremely anxious. However, a high level of background tension is undesirable, because worry or other anxiety symptoms can be easily triggered by small increases in arousal brought on by even trivial events.

Consider the following:

Where do you feel tension?

- Do you notice tension in your face and jaw?
- Do you clench your fists?
- What other parts of your body feel tense?
- Are there parts of your body where tension goes unnoticed until you feel pain?

What are the characteristics of the tension?

- Do the muscles feel stretched and sore?
- Do the muscles feel hard and contracted?
- Do the muscles feel tired?
- Does there appear to be effort involved in maintaining normal posture?

Which events lead to an increase in tension?

- Anger?
- Worry?
- The way people speak to you?
- Having to wait in lines or at traffic lights?
- Being watched while working?
- Your relationships?

Relax your body in a general, total sense: achieving the relaxation response

Progressive muscle relaxation means that the muscles are relaxed in a progressive manner, usually starting with the hands and arms and ending with the leg muscles. Both sides of the tape you have been given have instructions for progressive muscle relaxation. Side A is a 25-minute version. Side B is an abbreviated 15-minute version.

Relaxation exercises should be done at least once a day to begin with, preferably before any activity that might prove difficult. Initially, do the exercises in a quiet room, free from interruption, so that you can give your entire concentration to relaxation. Explaining the exercises to those you live with, and perhaps playing the tape to them, will generally lessen any embarrassment and aid in cooperation in minimizing interruptions. Select a comfortable chair with good support for your head and shoulders.

If a chair does not provide good support, use cushions placed against a wall. Some people prefer to do the exercises lying down, but do not use this position if you are likely to fall asleep. These relaxation exercises are not meant to put you to sleep, since you cannot learn to relax while asleep. Sleep is not the same as relaxation - consider those times when you have awakened tense. If you do want some method to put you to sleep, go over the relaxation exercises in your mind or keep a relaxation tape specifically for that purpose. As you master the relaxation exercises, try inducing deep relaxation in various postures and situations.

It is usually not a good idea to practice progressive muscle relaxation while performing activities that require a high degree of alertness, for example, driving a car or operating a machine. Instead, use one of the specific muscle exercises described further on.

When possible, it is advisable that you use the relaxation exercises as a preparation for some activity over which you anticipate difficulty. Decide which form of relaxation you will use, arrange your seating appropriately, finish all you need to do, and then start the exercises. It is important that you have nothing external to think about while you are relaxing. Therefore, if you are expecting a phone call, leave the phone off the hook; likewise, don't start cooking just before relaxing if something might boil over. When you are relaxing, you can be comfortably aware that any distractions that occur are not important and don't require your attention.

During the relaxation avoid tensing the muscles too tightly or they may become overly tense and then difficult to relax, or you may even cause cramping. About 60% to 70% of your maximum tension is usually recommended.

After you have finished the relaxation, don't jump up right away. First, you might feel momentarily dizzy and misinterpret this normal reaction as a sign of some other problem. Second, you might get straight back into the old habit of tensing. Get up slowly and try to preserve the state of relaxation for as long as possible. Set about your activities in a slow and peaceful manner.

Remember, relaxation is a skill and, as such, improves with practice. Do not despair if you do not reach deep levels of relaxation during your early sessions. The more frequently you practice relaxation, the deeper the relaxation will be, and the longer lasting the effect.

You will need to commit yourself to at least eight weeks of daily practice in order to achieve really long-lasting effects. Naturally, longer is even better. Some people continue daily relaxation many years after leaving treatment. If you can do this, we recommend it. However, not all people continue relaxation in this way. It is our experience that people who benefit most from relaxation either practice regularly, or practice immediately when they notice any increase in tension or anxiety.

Let tension go in specific muscles: isometric relaxation

Isometric relaxation exercises can be done in everyday situations. Most exercises do not involve any obvious change in posture or movement. Others involve some movement and are best reserved for doing in some place where movement or stretching isn't likely to draw too much attention.

In the early stages of training, you may have to do these exercises several times a day to counteract tension and maintain a relaxed state, particularly when anxious. As you improve, they will take less time and become easier. Eventually, you will find that you are doing them without thinking - that is, they may well become a habit that you will use automatically to counter tension.

There are some important points that need to be remembered when doing the isometric exercises. You are asked to hold your breath for seven seconds while you hold in tension, but some people occasionally find this too long. Don't become obsessive about holding your breath - try to hold it for seven seconds if you can but this is not crucial. The most important thing is to concentrate on putting the tension in slowly over approximately seven seconds and releasing the tension slowly over approximately seven seconds. The most common mistakes that people make with isometric exercises is putting the tension in too quickly, or putting in too much tension. These are meant to be gentle and slow exercises. The aim of the exercise is to relax you, not to get you even more tense. If circumstances do not allow you to hold the tension for seven seconds, you can still benefit from putting in the tension slowly over some period of time and releasing it in the same manner.

Some example exercises:

When sitting or lying down in private:

- Take a small breath and hold it for up to seven seconds.
- At the same time, straighten arms and legs out in front of you and stiffen all muscles in the body.
- After seven seconds, breathe out and slowly say the word "relax" to yourself.
- Let all the tension go from your muscles.
- For the next minute, each time you breathe out say the word "relax" to yourself and let all the tension flow out of your muscles.

Repeat if necessary until you feel relaxed.

When sitting in a public place:

- Take a small breath and hold it for up to seven seconds.
- At the same time, slowly tense leg muscles by crossing your feet at the ankles and press down with the upper leg while trying to lift the lower leg.
OR
- Pull the legs sideways in opposite directions while keeping them locked together at the ankles.
- After seven seconds, breathe out and slowly say the word "relax" to yourself.
- Let all the tension go from your muscles.
- For the next minute, each time you breathe out say the word "relax" to yourself and let all the tension flow out of your muscles.

Shoulders and neck:

- Hunch shoulders up toward the head
- Let shoulders drop and let arms hang loose

Important Points About Learning to Relax Quickly

- Relaxing is a skill - it improves with frequent and regular practice.
- Do the exercises immediately whenever you notice yourself becoming tense.
- Develop the habit of reacting to tension by relaxing.
- It helps to slowly tense and relax the muscles.
- When circumstances prevent you from holding the tension for seven seconds, shorter periods will still help but you may have to repeat the exercise a few more times.
- Do not tense your muscles to the point of discomfort or hold the tension for longer than seven seconds.
- Each of these exercises can be adapted to help in problem settings, such as working at a desk or waiting in a line. Use them whenever you need to relax.
- Using these exercises, you should in a few weeks be able to reduce tension and prevent yourself from becoming overly tense.

Difficulties with Relaxation

Some people report that they cannot relax or that they cannot bring themselves to practice relaxation. Since all human beings share a similar biological make-up, there is usually no purely physical reason why relaxation should work for some people and not others. The reason that relaxation may not work for some people is usually due to some psychological factor or insufficient practice.

I am too tense to relax.

In this case, the individual uses the very symptom that needs treating as an excuse for not relaxing. Relaxation may take longer than expected, but there is no reason why someone should have to remain tense.

I don't like the feelings of relaxation

About 1 in 10 people report that, when they relax, they come into contact with feelings that they don't like or feelings that frighten them. These feelings indicate that you are coming into contact with your body again and noticing sensations that may have been kept under check for many years. You do not have to worry about losing control during relaxation sessions. You can always let a little tension back in until you get used to the sensations.

I feel guilty wasting so much time

Relaxation is an important part of your recovery. Many therapies take time, for example, physiotherapy. You do not have to be openly productive to be doing something useful.

I can't find the place or time

Be adaptive. If you can't find 20 minutes, find 10 minutes somewhere in the day to relax. If you do not have a private room at work, go to a park. Relax during the evening, while your partner is reading the paper - you do not have to be alone to relax. Don't choose a time when you would rather be elsewhere. For example, don't choose to relax at lunchtime if you would prefer to be with friends.

I'm not getting anything out of this

Unfortunately, many people expect too much too soon from relaxation training. You cannot expect to undo years of habitual tensing in a few relaxation sessions. Impatience is one of the symptoms of anxiety, so you need to understand that this reaction is a sign that you actually need to continue with relaxation training. Give the training time to take effect. Set long-term goals, rather than monitor your improvement day-by-day.

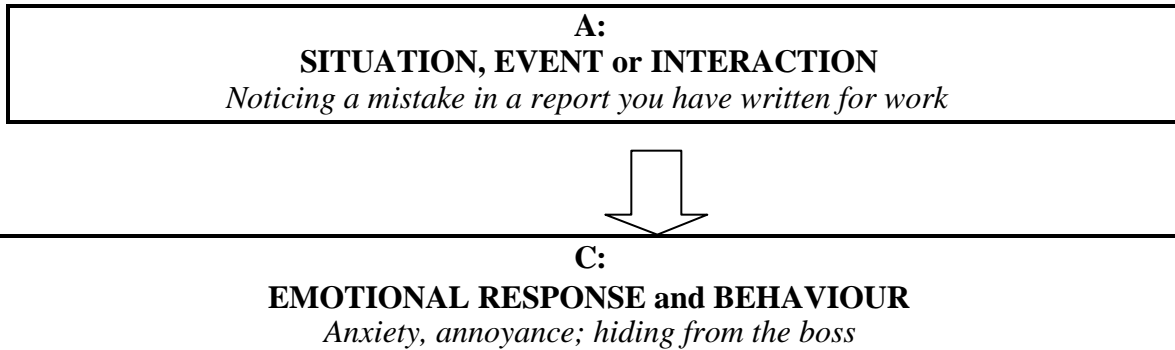
I haven't got the self-control.

You need to realize that quick, easy cures for long-standing tension that call for no effort from you do not exist. The longest-lasting treatment effects occur when an individual takes responsibility for his or her recovery and commits to daily practice of a relaxation strategy.

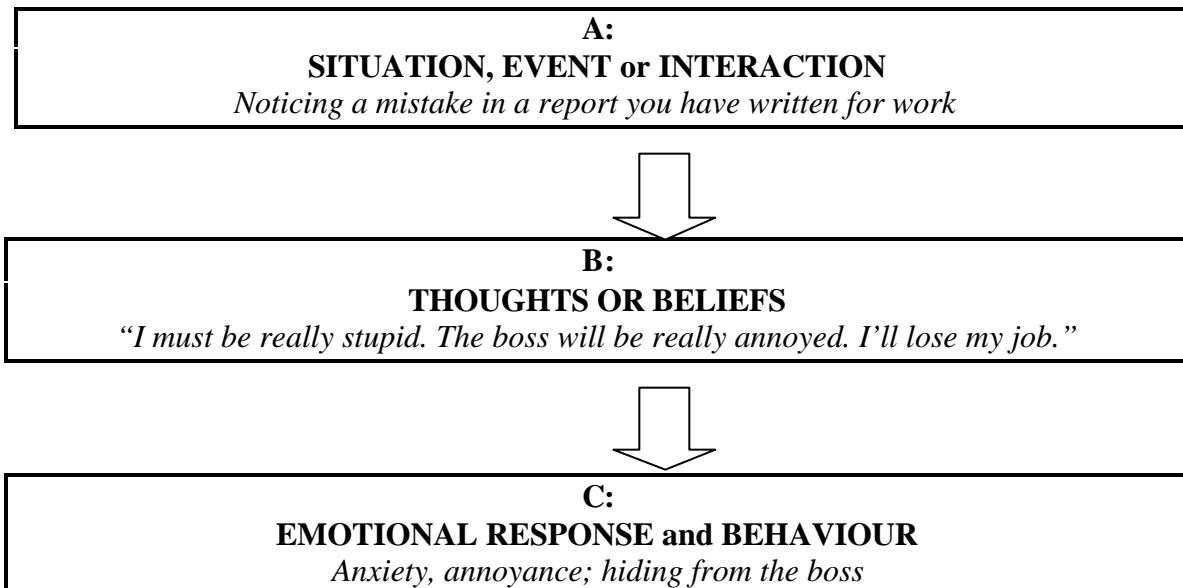
Section 4

Thinking strategies

Humans are thinking, feeling, and behaving beings. These three aspects of our make-up interact with each other. However, thoughts can often go unrecognized and we fail to realize the important role they play in the way we feel and behave. People often presume that events lead directly to feelings:



This presumption is important because it may lead people to believe that they have no influence over the way they think, feel or behave. But thoughts intervene between A and C, so the true association is:



Another important point is that different people will often have very different thoughts, and therefore very different reactions, in response to the same event.

Consider the following example. Three people are waiting at a bus stop. They see the bus approach, hail the bus – and it just drives past without stopping.

- The first person gets angry and clenches their fists
- The second person gets anxious and their heart starts to pound
- The third person shrugs their shoulders and gets on with reading the newspaper.

The same event produced three different responses, because it is not the event that directly produced the feelings and behavior, but rather, the thoughts the three people had about the event.

- The first person might have thought, *“That driver should have stopped! Now I’m going to be late for an important meeting!”*.
- The second person might have thought *“I’m going to be late, I’ll never get everything done in time, and the rest of the day will be a disaster!”*.
- The third might have thought *“I might be late, but there’s not much I can do about it right now.”*.

So people can respond differently to the same situation. Their emotional response and behaviour (C) is related to the way they think about or interpret (B) any given situation or event (A).

If you are like the first or second person in the example above you might tend to see things as worse than they need be, and you may be causing yourself unnecessary anxiety. All people who have suffered anxiety for many years develop habitual and unhelpful ways of thinking about situations. They often tend to expect the worst; often so much so that they bring the “worst” on. The way an individual reacts to events and to people is largely tied into the expectations and assumptions that that individual holds about particular situations and their self. Some of these expectations and assumptions may not be particularly helpful.

Expectations such as:

- *“I know that something dreadful is going to happen.”*
- *“I can’t concentrate and it’s affecting my whole life.”*
- *“I’ll always be anxious.”*
- *“My worry will drive me crazy”*
- *“Everyone will see that I’m not coping.”*

... are likely to increase anxiety.

Typically, these expectations and assumptions have been built up over a number of years, so much so that they at times seem automatic. They do, however, have significant implications for how upset you feel and how you actually behave.

It is important to recognize that unhelpful thinking patterns are habits, and that habits can be changed with effort and practice. Identifying unhelpful thoughts associated with anxiety is the first step in changing your thinking.

STEP 1:	IDENTIFY anxiety provoking thoughts
STEP 2:	CHALLENGE unhelpful anxiety provoking thoughts
STEP 3:	GENERATE more helpful alternatives

Identifying anxiety-provoking thoughts

In any situation or interaction in which you find yourself unhappy with your feelings or actions, ask yourself:

- What do I think might happen?
- What do I think about myself?
- What do I think about the other person?
- What do I think about the situation?
- How do I think I might cope?
- What will I do?

Individuals with generalized anxiety are often preoccupied with worries, ruminations and catastrophic thoughts. This “doom and gloom” type of thinking is centered on anticipated consequences (what might happen) or unreasonable self-expectations.

Hence individuals will often predict the worst outcome, overestimating the chance that it will happen:

“I’m not going to have enough time to prepare properly”. “It’ll be wrong” “I’ll fail the test” “I’ll develop a fatal illness”.

or may underestimate their own ability to cope:

“I’m just not good enough to succeed at this”. “I’ll just fall apart”

In some cases, the personal consequences of an event will be greatly exaggerated:

“It will be a disaster if this doesn’t work out right” “I’ll never get another job” “I’ll be a social outcast”

The thinking behind much anxiety is usually based on an extreme statement of what might happen rather than a realistic appraisal of what probably will happen. People are capable of taking a potentially unpleasant event and making it worse than it has to be by dwelling upon it, and by thinking in intricate detail of all the things that could potentially go wrong. If you have come to think about certain events or situations as dangerous or awful, then indeed you will be upset in direct response to your interpretation of “dangerous” or “awful”.

You quite obviously don’t do this deliberately, but over the years you may have developed patterns of thinking about the situations that upset you that are unhelpful and have become largely automatic. For example, the physical sensations of anxiety can be

very frightening. Someone who is worried that their anxiety symptoms may really be signs of an underlying and yet unrecognized serious physical illness would be said to be responding reasonably to their label, or interpretation, of their experiences. They believe the symptoms to be dangerous, even though they are objectively harmless. The problem is that the label applied is wrong! Worrying that one may be ill will cause more anxiety, and bring on even more of the unpleasant bodily feelings that caused the worry in the first place.

Once you have been able to identify what you have been saying to yourself, determine whether it was helpful in the situation. The following guide should help.

Helpful thoughts are generally:

REASONABLE	not	CATASTROPHIC
SELF-ENHANCING	not	SELF-DEFEATING
LOGICAL	not	ILLOGICAL
ACCURATE	not	INACCURATE
FLEXIBLE	not	RIGID

Challenging anxiety-provoking thinking.

Identifying and challenging your unhelpful automatic thoughts is not always that easy. To give you some extra help, there are four types of questions that you can ask yourself that may make the unhelpful aspects of the thoughts more clear.

- **What is the evidence for what I thought?**
- **What alternatives are there to what I thought?**
- **What is the effect of thinking the way I do?**
- **What thinking errors am I making?**

What is the evidence for what I thought?

Ask yourself if the thought would be accepted as correct by other people. From your or other people's experience, what is the evidence that what you believe is true? Ask yourself if you are jumping to conclusions by basing what you think on poor evidence. How do you know what you think is right?

As well as engaging in a mental exercise of weighing the evidence, you can actively go out and seek evidence for and against the belief.

Examples of anxiety-provoking thoughts could include:

1. *"If I'm anxious, they'll think I'm stupid and never want to talk to me again."*
2. *"Worrying it through might stop the worst from happening"*
3. *"If I were to slow down for even one minute, I'd never achieve anything."*

Each of the above thoughts may be unrealistic. If you had these thoughts, you could argue with yourself about their truth. However, the best test would be to see:

1. if people still spoke to you after you were anxious when you went out with them
2. if the feared event happened if you stopped worrying about it
3. whether or not you still got things done if you did slow down.

In weighing up the evidence, ask yourself:

- How likely is what I fear to happen?
- What is the worst thing that will realistically happen?
- How bad would that be, really?

What alternatives are there to what I thought?

Is the thought the only possible one that you could have? Perhaps there are alternative interpretations of an event or ways of thinking about something. What might someone else say about the situation. Determine if any of these alternative views have better evidence for them or would be more helpful in managing your feelings.

For example, You feel uncomfortable when talking to someone on whom you'd like to make a good impression. You notice yourself stammer slightly and are acutely aware of silences. You might think *"They must think I'm acting weird, they'll see I'm weak and anxious and won't want to know me"*

But how do you know?

They might be thinking *"she (he) seems a bit tense today, I hope nothing's the matter...."*

"... maybe they're not feeling well"

"I wonder if they'd like to see a movie tonight"

"Will I have enough time to get to the shops on the way home?"

What is the effect of thinking the way I do?

Another way of disputing your thoughts is to ask yourself what are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking that way. If you can think of an equally valid way of thinking that brings more advantages, why choose the one that brings disadvantages?

Perfectionism, or having to get it right all the time, is a common theme of worry in generalized anxiety disorder.

Advantages of having to get it right all the time	Disadvantages of having to get it right all the time
It can produce really good work	I get so anxious, I can't do my best
I try that much harder to do well	I don't take risks, and so miss many experiences
When something goes well, I feel great	I can't afford to make the mistakes that are necessary for learning
	I can't let anyone notice my mistakes, so miss out on valuable advice
	When others are critical of my work, I get defensive and angry
	My successes are undermined because subsequent failure wipes out their significance
	I don't have any constant idea of myself, just of how well I am doing at any given moment
	I can never think well of myself because it is impossible to get it right all the time
	My mistakes and failures are catastrophic

What thinking errors am I making?

Some examples of common thinking errors include:

Thinking in all-or-nothing terms. This is black-and-white thinking in which things are seen as all good or all bad, either safe or dangerous - there is no middle ground.

"I am totally hopeless if I am less than thoroughly competent or achieving in everything I do."

Using ultimatums. Beware of words like always, never, everyone, no one, everything, or nothing. Ask yourself if the situation really is as clear-cut as you are thinking.

"Things never go right for me. No-one else has problems like me."

Condemning yourself on the basis of a single event. Because there is one thing that you cannot do or have not done, you then label yourself a failure or worthless.

"I made a mistake today; I am a complete failure."

Concentrating on weaknesses and forgetting strengths. Try to think of other times you have attempted or even been successful at something and think about the resources that you really do have.

"My anxiety is taking so long to get over, I haven't made any progress and that's just typical of me."

Blaming yourself for what is not your fault. This will only make things worse, so think through the arguments for and against. If it is not your fault, stop blaming yourself (even if you cannot think of anyone or anything else to blame).

"I'm too weak to deal with my worry."

Taking things personally. Are you “personalizing” everything so that it is directed to you or caused by you when in fact it has nothing to do with you?

“That woman in the paper with cancer is the same age as me, I could have cancer”

Expecting perfection. People invariably make mistakes. Accepting imperfection does not mean accepting low standards but it means acknowledging mistakes and learning from them rather than being paralyzed by failure.

“Its got to be exactly right, or it is not even worth starting”

Using double standards. Many people expect of themselves what they would not expect of others. Ask yourself, “How would I react if it was someone else in my situation? Would I be so hard on them?”

“I can’t possibly say that I disagree with them, they’d be annoyed and dislike me”

Overestimating the chances of disaster. Things will certainly go wrong and there is danger in the world, but are you overestimating these? How likely is it that what you expect will really happen?

“I might lose my way, my car will break down, I’ll be stranded, or bashed or raped”

Exaggerating the importance of events. Often we think that some event will be much more important than it turns out to be. Ask yourself, “What difference will it make in a week or 10 years? Will I still feel this way?”

“That fight we had yesterday has ruined everything”

Fretting about the way things ought to be. Telling yourself that things should be different or that you must act in a certain way indicates that you may be worrying about how things “ought “ to be rather than dealing with them as they are.

“I must get rid of this worry. It’s not normal”

I can do nothing to change the situation. Pessimism about a lack of ability to change a situation leads to feelings of depression and lowered self-esteem. There may be no solution, but you will not know until you try. Ask yourself if you are really trying to find answers and solutions.

“I can’t help the way I think. I can’t change or control my feelings.”

Predicting the future. Just because you acted a certain way in the past does not mean that you have to act that way forevermore. Predicting what you will do on the basis of past behavior means that you will cut yourself off from the possibility of change.

“I usually get anxious at parties, so I know I won’t enjoy the next one”.

Blaming the past. Just because certain things happened in the past doesn't mean that significant changes cannot be made by you for the future.

”My past is the cause of all my problems. It will continue to affect me and I will never change.”

Generating alternative thinking

Changing the way you think sounds easier than it is. Having identified the automatic and unhelpful thoughts that contribute to anxiety, you will need to learn to look at each of these thoughts objectively and then say what a realistic view of the situation is. This process is going to take time and effort on your part.

If your thinking pattern is well-learned and practiced until it becomes habitual, it can become difficult to shake. You will need to write down your worries and what you fear and then evaluate whether the fear is justified or whether it is an unrealistic view of a situation. The objective in learning how to change the way you think is not to try to convince yourself that things are better than they are; rather, the aim is to be able to recognize when your thinking is unhelpful.

Following are some examples of such unhelpful thinking, together with some alternatives for each of the situations involved.

Anxiety provoking thoughts	Helpful thoughts/ Alternative interpretations
What if everything goes wrong?	Its unlikely that everything will go wrong. Worrying about something that may go wrong won't stop it from happening.
I couldn't cope.	I wouldn't like it, but if anything went wrong I will survive it. I always have done so in the past.
I'm not good enough to do this well.	I like to do things well most of the time but like everyone, I will occasionally make a mistake. I may feel bad, but I can handle that. I will try my best.
Surely these feelings really mean that I have a serious illness	I am feeling symptoms of anxiety, which I know cannot harm me. I am unlikely to have anything seriously wrong with me that all the doctors have missed.
I keep thinking that something dreadful will happen to the people close to me.	There is no evidence that anything bad is about to happen. I won't dwell on future events that are unlikely to happen.

Helpful thinking does not reject all negative thoughts; it is not simply wishful thinking. It involves looking at things in a way that is most realistic, given the facts. For example:

UNHELPFUL THINKING:

"I didn't get the job, which proves that I am a failure. I'll never get a job or have things go right for me."

HELPFUL THINKING:

"I am disappointed I didn't get that job, but I can cope."

WISHFUL THINKING:

"Who cares! I didn't want the job anyway."

UNHELPFUL THINKING

"What if I can't cope with this? It will be absolutely disastrous."

HELPFUL THINKING:

"I'm going to give this a try. I'll give it my best shot and see how it goes."

WISHFUL THINKING:

"It'll be easy!"

All our thoughts do not necessarily have to be centered on disappointments, but it is often in such situations that you can feel anxious or hopeless. If things do not go as you would hope or if people do not behave as you would like, check if your disappointment is reasonable. If so, face your disappointment but do not make a catastrophe out of it, either!

Assumptions and core beliefs.

While automatic thoughts are relatively accessible as verbal messages in your conscious mind, it may be important to learn to recognize the assumptions or core beliefs that lie behind the thoughts.

Assumptions operate as rules that guide our daily actions and expectations, and are usually "If ... then ..." or "should" statements. Some examples of assumptions are "*If I don't get things right all the time then people will think that I am stupid*" or "*If I let other people see what I'm really like then they might not like me*" or "*Others mightn't like you if you disagree with them.*"

The deepest level of thinking is the core belief. Core beliefs are absolute statements about yourself, other people, or the world. Some examples of core beliefs are "*I am stupid*" or "*Others will reject the real me*" or "*It is wrong to disagree*"

Many people would have held these assumptions and core beliefs since their childhood. Young children develop rules to make sense of their experiences ("*dogs bite*", "*dogs are friendly*") and to guide their behavior ("*stay away from dogs*", "*play with dogs*"). Children also learn rules from the things others tell them and from observing the way

others behave. These rules are not necessarily true and, in childhood, may not be very flexible (“*all dogs bite*”, “*all dogs are friendly*”). As people grow older they tend to be able to develop more flexible rules as they learn that everything is not black and white. However some beliefs may remain inflexible, even into adulthood, and will continue to dictate how you interpret and react across various situations. If the assumptions or core beliefs are unrealistic and unhelpful then they may lead to intense or long-lasting levels of anxiety or depression. Luckily, assumptions and core beliefs can be changed in much the same way as automatic thoughts.

(i) Identify beliefs

- look for repeated themes in your thought monitoring or diary
- ask yourself “If that were true, what would it mean about me?”

(ii) Test beliefs

- gather evidence that the belief may not be 100% true
- critically examine your beliefs and their effect on your feelings and behavior
- consider the advantages and disadvantages of holding the belief
- allow more time for change in assumptions and beliefs than in automatic thoughts

(iii) Record evidence that a belief may not be 100% true all of the time.

(iv) Identify alternative helpful beliefs

Through the program, you will be asked to write down your thinking for each situation or circumstance where you find yourself anxious or worrying. Use the **Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking** found on the following pages. (Extra copies can also be found at the back of this manual).

Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking

Date: _____

Describe the situation	Identify and list automatic thoughts	Objective reappraisal
	How did you feel:	How did you feel
	How strong was that feeling ____%	How strong was
	How strong is your belief ____%	How strong is yo

Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking

Date: _____

Describe the situation	Identify and list automatic thoughts	Objective reappraisal
	How did you feel:	How did you feel
	How strong was that feeling ____%	How strong was
	How strong is your belief ____%	How strong is yo

Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking

Date: _____

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Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking

Date: _____

Describe the situation	Identify and list automatic thoughts	Objective reappraisal
	How did you feel:	How did you feel
	How strong was that feeling ____%	How strong was
	How strong is your belief ____%	How strong is yo

Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking

Date: _____

Describe the situation	Identify and list automatic thoughts	Objective reappraisal
	How did you feel:	How did you feel
	How strong was that feeling ____%	How strong was
	How strong is your belief ____%	How strong is yo

Section 5

Managing Worry

Individuals with generalized anxiety worry a lot. These worries tend to center on everyday things; we all worry to some extent about problems that might arise at home or at work, about illness or injury afflicting ourselves or our family, about difficulties in our relationships with others, or even financial pressures. Individuals with generalized anxiety will recognize that they worry excessively about these things, that the worries are often unrealistic, and that the worry takes up a large part of their typical day. Unfortunately, it is this type of worry that can interfere with daily functioning, and can increase anxiety and tension levels.

Excessive worry or ruminating about events that are unlikely to happen can make you feel worse than you need to and may even increase feelings that you cannot cope. It may feel as though by worrying about things you might be able to anticipate and avoid future catastrophes, but in reality the worry does not lead to productive or constructive action. Instead, problems remain unsolved, fears are not confronted, and the unhelpful beliefs about events or situations continue unchallenged. In the following sections practical steps for dealing with worry are described.

Problem Solving

Determine if there is a real problem that requires solving. Ask yourself:

- Is the feared event likely to happen?
- Is it imminent?
- Is there anything you can do about it?

If you answer yes, deal with the problem using an efficient problem-solving strategy (covered in Section 6). For example, you might be in a situation where you need to find a new job, move house, or put up an unexpected and unwelcome house guest. Rather than worry about how you will cope, you can short-circuit the worry by planning how to solve the problem – then make sure the plan is put into action!

Indecision

Determine if the worry is driven by indecision. Many individuals with Generalized Anxiety Disorder are anxious that they might do something wrong or make the wrong decision. They may be overly perfectionistic. The anxiety may cause these individuals to procrastinate or continually put off making a decision, or they may deliberately continue to “worry through” the decision in an attempt to ensure that they don’t make a mistake. For example, people may find themselves going through a lengthy series of questions and answers about major life decisions such as “Am I in the right job?”, “Am I in the right relationship?”. Or there may be a series of day-to-day decisions that cause worry, such as “Should I go to that party?” “What present should I buy my partner?” or “Which task should I start first?”

Unfortunately this “worrying it through” process does not usually help to find the “right” decision (as there may not be such a thing as the “right” or “wrong” answer) but instead increases and extends feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, thereby feeding the indecision. Furthermore, this process may cause you to come up with a wider range of catastrophic

consequences that you would otherwise have come up with. In other words, the more you worry, the more and more negative you may become.

If your worry is driven by indecision:

- Determine if there is any unhelpful thinking that lies behind your worry. For example “Is there really a “right” answer to your decision?” “Realistically, what would really happen if you made a decision one way or the other?” “What’s the worst that could happen?” “What evidence is there that you are unable to make a decision?”
- If there is a decision to be made, set a reasonable amount of time to reach a decision, and then act on it! The problem solving strategy described in Section 6 can be helpful here.
- Then make sure that you don’t engage in any further worry about the decision (see ‘Letting Go of Worries’ below).

Worry about worry

A number of examples of worry about worry can be challenged using the strategies covered in the previous section.

Worry is really bad for my health
Worry will drive me mad
I can’t control my worry
I will worry like this for the rest of my life

Ask yourself:

- “*what is the effect of thinking this way?*”
- “*what is the evidence to support these beliefs?*”
- “*what alternative explanations might there be?*”
- “*what is more likely based on past experience*”

For example, if you worry that you will be unable to control your worry, ask yourself what typically happens when you do worry. Are you really never able to stop it? What eventually stops the worry? So next time, how likely is it that the worry will go on and on forever? What do you think would happen if you tried to postpone the worry by telling yourself that you will give yourself time to think about it later in the day? Why don’t you try this and see what happens. What would happen if you deliberately tried to lose control through worry?

Many unhelpful beliefs about worry can be challenged by deliberately engaging in (or even exaggerating) worry episodes to see if the feared consequences come about. For example, if you have come to think that your worry will drive you into madness why don’t you test this out by deliberately engaging in your worst worries and see what actually happens!

Letting Go of Worries

It may be helpful to think of times when you have not been troubled by worry and rumination. Probably during these times you were involved intently in an activity that you enjoyed a lot or that took up all of your attention. It is very difficult to think properly about more than one thing at the same time.

Thus, it is sometimes useful to have a strategy to draw your attention away from worrying thoughts - once you have decided that it is appropriate not to continue to think about them. You have probably already noticed that it is extremely difficult to stop such thoughts just by trying to push them out of your mind. A better solution is to acknowledge the worry, and then focus your attention on something else.

For example

“That’s a worry. It’s not worth my thinking about it. I’ll get on with my work”

“I can’t determine exactly what will happen in the future, I will focus on what I’d like to do today”

If stuck, here are some examples of things to do:

- Concentrate on what is happening around you. Get involved in the moment. Choose something that is likely to interest you and engage your attention. Give yourself a specific task; listen carefully to the conversation, begin the next task at work, make that telephone call.
- Engage in some form of mental activity. Read a magazine or book, complete a crossword puzzle, watch a movie.
- Engage in some form of physical activity. Do some exercise, wash the car, take the dog for a walk.

If you find it very difficult to re-focus your attention, you may need to improve your skill. Some individuals find that regular use of a breathing exercise or meditation make very good attention-focussing exercises.

Remember, few people can successfully focus their attention away from their worries on their first few attempts. It is important to acknowledge that daily practice and repeatedly re-focusing attention will help to build the skill and maximize the chances of success.

Section 6

Structured Problem Solving

Our lives are full of problems to be solved, ranging from major life crises to the more mundane hassles of our day-to-day lives. However, no matter how small or trivial the matter, if problems remain unsolved, or if the way they are resolved is unsatisfactory, they can lead to feelings of uncontrollability or the perception of threat, which are major contributors to anxiety.

Structured problem solving is a useful strategy for anyone with problems, whether those problems are related to anxiety, or other personal matters, such as dealing with a difficult colleague at work. The approach can also be used by groups of people, such as families, friends, and work-mates. For example, your family may be facing financial difficulties and may need to cut expenses, or they may have a problem in that nobody is prepared to do the dishes in the evening. Problem solving can also be applied to achieving goals, such as getting a job, planning a social activity, or improving one's fitness.

There are no perfect or ideal solutions to problems, but the structured problem-solving approach aims to lead you to the most effective plan for action.

Setting Up a Problem-Solving Session.

Because this structured approach is best suited for problems that are difficult, serious, or capable of causing anxiety and worry, problem solving should occur only in certain settings and at times specifically set aside for that purpose. For instance, do not try to do problem solving while watching television or cooking the dinner. There should be no competing jobs or distractions: Take the phone off the hook, or if you have young children, plan to hold your problem-solving session after they have gone to bed.

When you first start to use the problem-solving method, try to avoid problems that are very difficult, emotional, or are particularly long-standing. If people become too angry or anxious during the problem solving procedure, it may be difficult to follow the steps. It may be better to first deal with easier issues until you are used to the method.

Do not attempt to solve more than two problems in the one sitting. It is useful to plan an agenda in advance. In this way, you will more likely avoid unrelated worries or ruminations that will interfere with the problem-solving process. It is often useful to write down all of your problem-solving exercises. Use the same structure as the problem-solving sheet provided. Writing things down will often put problems and solutions into better perspective and ensure that a record of the decisions you make is always available.

Identifying Problems

Most people will have no difficulty in recognizing where their problems lie, but to help you in this task, the following points may be helpful:

- Use your feelings as a cue for recognizing problems. Rather than viewing your feelings as the problem, consider what may be causing the way you feel. If you have interpreted the circumstances correctly, then the event itself may be a problem that needs to be addressed, changed or resolved.
- Use your behavior as a cue for recognizing problems. If you continue to make mistakes, or things don't work out as you would like, the situation itself may be the problem and you may be able to manage it more effectively.
- Consider the content of your worries. Is there a problem that requires solving behind these worries?

Step 1. Defining Problems and Goals

A clear definition of a problem or goal is the next step in problem solving. Goals should be realistic and fairly easy to attain. Defining problems or goals helps to focus thinking on the issue at hand and minimize the possibility of getting sidetracked onto other issues. Also, it makes it easier to know when the goal has been achieved or the problem solved.

At this stage of problem solving, there are some “rules” that will make the definition of a suitable goal or problem more likely:

- Do not get sidetracked into attempting to solve the problem at this stage. This attempt will not help to define the problem and may only lead to increased worry or anxiety.
- **Be specific.** The more specific the goal or problem, the easier it will be to solve. For example, avoid vague statements along the lines of “*I want to feel better,*” or “*My boss is inconsiderate*”. Rather, redefine the problem in terms of the actual feelings or behaviors, such as “*I want to reduce my headaches*” or “*I am unhappy about my boss expecting me to work on weekends without extra pay.*”
- **Focus toward the future.** Because problem solving aims to provide a plan to deal with present or future events, don't focus on past occurrences of the problem or distant causes underlying the problem. For example, “*I would like to go out to lunch with my work colleagues and feel comfortable*”, is better than “*I avoided lunching with my work colleagues last week because I was too anxious.*”
- Some difficult goals may need to be broken down into smaller goals that can be achieved more easily and in a shorter period of time. For example, if a goal involves finding a new job, the first step may be to decide what sort of job to look for.

Write down some of your problems and goals in the spaces below.

Step 2. Generating Solutions through Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a method by which we come up with as many alternative solutions as possible. Rather than try to think of the best or ideal solution, we list any ideas that come into our minds, including those that we may think are not useful or even absurd. In fact, some of the proposed solutions should deliberately be absurd - use your imagination! Even though a solution may at first seem ridiculous, it may help to generate better solutions than those that are more obvious.

At this stage of problem solving, there is no discussion of the solutions. They are just listed.

Select a problem that you can work on and try to define it so that it is specific, concrete, and attainable. As an exercise in brainstorming, try to come up with as many possible solutions for this problem. Try also to think of a few ridiculous solutions.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM? _____

LIST ALL POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Step 3. Evaluating the Solutions

This step involves a brief discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each solution. Do not write these down, just quickly run through the list of solutions, noting the strengths and weaknesses of each. No solution will be ideal, as every good idea will have some faults, such as requiring time or money. However, most bad ideas will also have some advantages as well - for example, they may be easy to apply and provide some short-term relief, but not really solve the problem in the longer run.

Briefly run through the solutions you generated to the problem above.

Step 4. Choosing the Optimal Solution

In this step, the aim is to choose the solution (or combination of solutions) that will solve the problem or achieve a goal.

It is often helpful to choose a solution that can be readily applied and not too difficult to implement, even though it may not be the ideal solution. At least, you can get started right away. The problem may not be solved immediately, but you might have made a difference, and what you learn by trying might be useful the second time around. This is preferable to choosing a solution that is doomed to failure because you have been overly ambitious.

Outline the solution (or combination of solutions) you have agreed upon in the space below.

Step 5. Planning

A detailed plan of action will increase the likelihood that the problem will be solved. Even if your solution is excellent, it will not be of any use if it isn't put into practice. The most common reason why solutions fail is through a lack of planning. Be sure to spend some time on this planning stage.

Imagine that you are planning the solution for the problem you have solved. Outline the steps you would plan in the space below.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

The following checklist applies to any problem and is helpful to see if you have planned properly:

- Do you have the necessary resources available (time, skills, equipment, money) or are you able to arrange the necessary resources or help?
- Do you have the agreement or cooperation of other people that might be involved in the plan?
- Have all the steps been examined for possible difficulties?
- Have any strategies been planned to cope with likely difficulties? Setting specified times or deadlines will minimize the risk of procrastination.

- Have any strategies been planned to cope with any negative (or positive) consequences?
- Have difficult parts of the plan been rehearsed, for example, a telephone call, conversation, interview, or speech?
- Has a time been set for a review of the overall progress of the plan?

Step 6. Review

Problem solving is a continuing process as problems are often not resolved or goals not attained after only one attempt. Because not every possible difficulty is considered at the planning stage, ongoing reviews are necessary to cope with unexpected set-backs. Steps may need to be changed or new ones added.

It will also be important to praise all efforts that have been made. If you reward yourself and others for the work that has been done, it is more likely that the successful process will be followed and that problems will be solved in the future.

When things don't go as planned:

- What went right?
- What went wrong?
- What alternative strategies could be used?
- Acknowledge feelings of disappointment, but do not allow any unhelpful thinking to turn the disappointment into a catastrophe. Difficulties are usually due to a poorly planned strategy rather than personal inadequacy. Everyone does as best they can.
- Label any attempt as partial success rather than failure. Consider partial success as practice and a useful learning experience.
- Try again as soon as possible.

Problem-solving practice

From now on, whenever you are faced with a difficulty or problem that appears difficult to resolve, use the following six-step method of structured problem solving. For many problems, there are no easy answers or ideal solutions, but at least you will know that you have tackled your problem in the most effective and efficient manner.

Structured Problem Solving

STEP 1: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM/GOAL? Think about the problem/goal carefully, ask yourself questions. Then write down *exactly* what the problem/goal is.

STEP 2: LIST ALL POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS Put down all ideas, even bad ones. List the solutions *without evaluation* at this stage.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

STEP 3: ASSESS EACH POSSIBLE SOLUTION. *Quickly* go down the list of possible solutions and assess the *main* advantages and disadvantages of each one.

STEP 4: CHOOSE THE “BEST” OR MOST PRACTICAL SOLUTION. Choose the solution that can be carried out most easily to solve (or to begin to solve) the problem.

STEP 5: PLAN HOW TO CARRY OUT THE BEST SOLUTION. List the resources needed and the major pitfalls to overcome. Practice difficult steps, make notes of information needed.

STEP 6: REVIEW PROGRESS AND BE PLEASED WITH ANY PROGRESS. Focus on *achievement first*. Identify what has been achieved, then what still needs to be achieved. Go through steps 1\6 again in the light of what has been achieved or learned.

Section 7

Dealing with behaviours that maintain anxiety or worry

When anxiety occurs for the first time with a certain situation, most people believe that should they confront that same situation again, they would be more than likely to become anxious. Likewise, certain activities or problems may also have become associated over time with discomfort or anxiety. The occurrence of anxiety is unpleasant and so, as any sensible person would, sufferers soon learn to try to anticipate the situations or events likely to trigger their anxiety.

Of course, it is quite helpful to behave in a way to minimize objective danger, such as getting your doctor to check an unusual sunspot or avoiding deserted parts of the city late at night. On these occasions the anxiety that causes us to act in these ways will serve a useful purpose. The problem is that when they are anxious, individuals with generalized anxiety will often avoid situations that are not dangerous, such as upsetting television or newspaper stories, meeting certain people, or anything that might remind them of their fears or worries. Others will put off doing things that they know should be done, or avoid solving their problems. Yet others will unnecessarily seek reassurance from those around them to decrease their fears or doubts.

**The problem with these behaviours is that the relief is only temporary.
In practice, the things we avoid become harder and harder to do, and gradually we
avoid more and more things.
The need to seek reassurance becomes greater, and more and more reassurance is
required to relieve the anxiety.**

When anxiety is relieved by something we do, the fear can be made even worse, because the feeling of relief and drop in anxiety following the behaviour tells the primitive part of the brain that the behaviour was sensible. Thus, the behavior is reinforced or strengthened; after all, if you can avoid anxiety by acting in a particular way, why not do so? Unfortunately, you just identify more and more situations as difficult and avoid them also.

Then what is the cure? If avoiding the things you fear makes them harder and harder to face, what would happen if you started to confront your fears? If the fear is reinforced by seeking reassurance, what would happen if you prevented yourself from checking? Actually, if you confronted your fears or doubts for long enough, it would eventually go, and the fear the next time you encountered that situation would be less. However, most people don't like to put this to the test, so they keep avoiding those situations or seeking reassurance.

One good way to break behaviours is to start with easy situations and slowly build up enough confidence to face the harder things. The other important strategy is to control the level of the anxiety using the breathing exercise and controlling worrying thoughts, and then stay with the situation until you have become more calm.

But how do you organize such experiences? First, you need to identify all behaviours that might be maintaining anxiety.

You would have already made a list of

- situations or circumstance that trigger worry or anxiety
- the situations that you avoid because of anxiety or worry
- behaviours you engage in response to your worry

Make sure that you include things that might not be obvious at first, such as certain topics of conversation or news items, missed opportunities, uncertainty, thoughts of illness or accidents, not accepting invitations, putting things off, or cutting activities short.

Then you plan ways of changing the behaviour so that it no longer prevents you from facing what you fear. Some examples are listed below

Avoiding newspaper items about life-threatening illness
 Being unable to leave work until all correspondence is checked
 Putting off your tax until a few days before the deadline

Next, rank those situations or circumstances in terms of the anxiety that they cause, or would potentially cause. If the anxiety is too high to allow you to directly change that behaviour then:

1. you can break down the behaviour into smaller, more manageable steps
2. you might need to address unrealistic worries about the outcome of this change in behaviour

Example: Avoiding newspaper items about life-threatening illness

Planned task	Predicted anxiety
<i>Leave newspaper open at 'non-cancer' illness article until anxiety lessens</i>	50%
<i>Read 'non-cancer' illness article repeatedly until anxiety lessens</i>	70%
<i>Leave newspaper open at 'cancer' article until anxiety lessens</i>	75%
<i>Read 'cancer' article repeatedly until anxiety lessens</i>	90%

Example: Being unable to leave work until all correspondence is checked

Planned task	Predicted anxiety
<i>Don't check e-mail before leaving work</i>	50%
<i>E-mail unchecked for one day</i>	60%
<i>Leave all new letters unopened and e-mail unchecked for one day</i>	85%
<i>Leave all new letters unopened and e-mail unchecked for two days</i>	100%

Carefully monitor and record your progress on the sheets provided. This will help you to both structure your progress and give you feedback as to how you are doing., Make sure a task is attempted every day until you feel comfortable with the situation.

Section 8

Keeping Your Practice Going

Some people have difficulty keeping up practice of their anxiety management skills. This difficulty may be because they don't think that they are making any progress, even though other people may see a change. Progress is often slow, and sometimes difficult to notice over a number of days. Take care not to underrate your achievements. Learn to praise yourself for your efforts as well as successes, every problem solved, and every goal achieved. Remember that praising yourself is an important factor in maintaining motivation, particularly in the early stages following treatment.

Dealing with Setbacks

Setbacks can occur occasionally, even in persons who are making excellent progress. When this happens, people often become alarmed and despondent, fearing they have gone back to their very worst. Remember, no matter how badly you feel during a setback, it is very rare for you to go all the way back to your worst level of incapacitation. Also, day-to-day fluctuations in anxiety levels are bound to occur in the period after your treatment, just as in general day-to-day life. It is also important to remember that at these times it may be more difficult to think realistically about situations, and you may find some of your old worries (or some new ones) creeping back into your thinking.

For most people the apparent setback is only a passing phase, due to external factors such as extra work demands, the flu, or school holidays. In such cases, the set-back is often viewed as devastating because it has a lot of emotional meaning for the person who has put considerable effort into gaining control over anxiety. But this effort is not wasted and, after the stressful time passes, you can learn from this experience and again will find you are able to deal with anxiety. We often see this pattern. It is common, however, for people to worry that they will relapse as a result of encountering set-backs.

Expect to Lapse Occasionally

Here, a lapse means that you stop noticing any changes in your breathing rates, start to engage in old unhelpful worries again, or stop exercising for a while. This is very different from experiencing a full relapse of your disorder. A relapse would involve a return to levels of symptoms you experienced before treatment and no use of any of the techniques you have learned.

So, the trick is to not turn a lapse into a relapse and exaggerate the lapse into being bigger than it really is. Most people will have some sort of lapse when they are trying to change their behavior. If you have noticed that you have slipped in your use of the anxiety management skills, don't say things to yourself such as:

"I'm really hopeless. I'm right back where I started from. I'll never be able to change."

Instead, you can view your lapse in the following light:

"I'm disappointed that I have let things slip, but I can deal with that and I'm not going to turn it into an excuse for giving up altogether. Now, I'll get out my manual and start my practice again."

Therefore, if you have a set-back don't add to the problem with all the old catastrophic, emotional, and unhelpful ideas. Keep practicing all the techniques you have been taught and you will still be making progress.

Of course, some people do stop things like relaxation training or slow breathing when they have been feeling okay for some time. This is fine, so long as you keep aware of any stress or anxiety that may be creeping back into your life, and restart the exercises as soon as you become aware of any increase. It will also be important to reinstate such techniques if you have recently experienced any stress or life event.

It may also be helpful to revisit some of the thinking strategies you found useful over treatment. For example, rather than trying to deal with unhelpful worries in your mind, write them down! You will remember that this helps you to distance yourself from your fears and to be more realistic in your thinking.

Long-lasting change

People with long-standing anxiety have usually suffered for a long time. Most often, anxiety problems will begin in adolescence, but most individuals do not reach treatment until their late twenties or thirties.

In this program, our aim is that you will not only change your reactions and your ability to cope with adversity, but also change the way you have learned to think. Such ways of thinking may have become an intrinsic feature of your personality, perhaps even that part of yourself that you consider makes up what is "you." However, this feature turns you into your own worst enemy. In effect, you will eventually need to change the unhelpful aspects of the way you think and behave. You will need to do this in order to make your life more rewarding, to make you more effective and efficient in your work, and to help you to become closer to the people around you.

These changes will not be easy, because changing a fundamental part of your personality is not easy. But with continued and solid practice of the new skills you have learned, you will continue to make positive changes over future months and even years. Before you realize what has happened, you will find yourself saying:

"I used to get upset about that, but now I don't!"

References and Recommended Reading

The following books are available from many large bookstores (e.g., Dymocks, Angus and Roberson), as well as University Co-op. Bookshops (e.g., Bay Street Co-op., Broadway, and the University of New South Wales Co-op Bookshop). If in doubt, ask if the book can be ordered. We also suggest that you use your local library to gain access to many of these books. These books are suggested as additional references and serve only as guidelines. Be critical in both a positive and negative sense when reading these or other books on the management of anxiety, so that you get what is best for you out of them.

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Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking

Date: _____

Describe the situation	Identify and list automatic thoughts	Objective reappr.
	How did you feel:	How did you feel
	How strong was that feeling ____%	How strong was
	How strong is your belief ____%	How strong is yo

Record of attempts to change unhelpful thinking

Date: _____

Describe the situation	Identify and list automatic thoughts	Objective reappr.
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	How strong was that feeling ____%	How strong was
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	How strong is your belief ____%	How strong is yo