



Anxiety/Manawapā

Adapted from www.drugfoundation.org.nz info and www.getselfhelp.co.uk

This resource is for people who want to understand anxiety/manawapā and how to manage it. It includes links to available resources and supports.

About one in four people experience anxiety sometime in their life. Feeling anxious at times is natural and can be helpful. Anxiety supports people to focus on what needs to be done to avoid harm. It helps in focusing attention, making decisions, and responding to physical threats. When feeling threatened, the body prepares to fight, flee, or freeze to survive. Threats might be events that people witness, experience, or remember.

If anxiety goes unchecked or becomes overwhelming it can interfere with people's everyday lives.

- › Anxiety can arise from both present and perceived threats.
- › An anxious response can occur whether it is helpful or not.
- › Intense anxiety can be distressing.
- › Anxiety that continues for too long can leave people feeling tired/ngenge, sad/matapōuri and prone to physical illnesses.

Anxiety can lead to constant scanning and hyper-alertness to signs of danger. This increases the risk of staying anxious when it is not useful.

You do not have to experience anxiety alone. Seeking support from your whānau, friends, GP or health professional can help you get through. If you feel overwhelmed or just want to talk, call or text **1737** or check out some of the support options at the end of this document.

How anxiety affects us

Anxiety can affect people in many different ways, including thoughts, feelings, and physical responses, and is different for everyone. Anxiety can be managed more effectively by learning how to recognise it.

Thoughts

- › Anxious thoughts and feelings often relate to a sense that a problem or situation is overwhelming and you are unable to cope.
- › Common thoughts include "I'm in danger right now". "The worst possible scenario is going to happen". "I won't be able to cope with it".

Physical sensations

Particular physical sensations may be experienced when feeling anxious.

- › **Racing or uneven heartbeat** and thoughts of having a heart attack.
- › **Rapid breathing** can lead to chest pain, breathlessness, a choking feeling, dizziness or light-headedness, and blurred vision.
- › **Sensations on the skin, fingers, and toes** can involve tingling, coldness, numbness, sweating, or looking pale or flushed.
- › **Muscle tension** due to the large muscles tensing, causing aching, shaking, pain, and headaches.
- › **Enlarged pupils** that may cause sensitivity to light or spots appearing before the eyes.
- › **Digestive upsets** when the digestive system slows down for the body to prepare to get away from the threat. This may lead to nausea, “butterflies in the stomach”, a dry mouth, or diarrhoea.

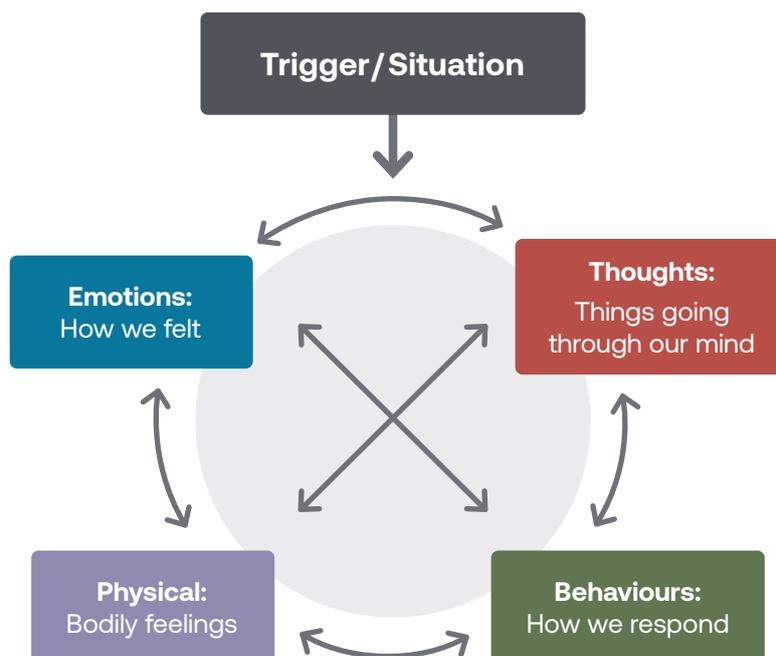
Behaviours

Anxiety can affect what people do. Some people may avoid triggering their anxiety by:

- › not going out
- › avoiding people or places
- › “escaping” or leaving situations early
- › going to certain places at particular times
- › using tobacco/kai paipa, alcohol/waipiro, and other substances.
- › While these behaviours may help people feel safe and cope with anxiety in the short term, they can make anxiety worse in the long term.

Understanding anxiety

Anxiety is often made worse by a cycle in which the body, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours interact with each other. This cycle can intensify anxious thoughts, as shown below.



Doing things differently to reduce anxiety

Some anxiety is natural and helpful. Avoiding things can make anxiety worse and lead to increased anxiety. There is a need to:

- › prevent anxiety from becoming overwhelming or constant
- › use strategies to reduce the level of anxiety felt or remove the cause.

Below are some actions to reduce anxiety.

Doing self-care differently

Look after your health and wellbeing.

- › Eat nutritious and healthy kai regularly and drink plenty of water.
- › Exercise to reduce anxiety and stress.
- › Have around 8 hours sleep or more each night.
- › Take time to do things you find fun and relaxing.

Identify what triggers your anxiety

What triggers your anxiety? Triggers can lead to intense physical or emotional reactions that make you feel anxious. Ask yourself, what makes you anxious, and when does this happen? By seeing patterns, you can do something about them. Is it certain times, places, people, situations, thoughts, or memories? Or something else? By figuring out what your triggers are, you can develop a plan to address your anxiety.

Different triggers require different approaches. Some triggers are avoidable, and others are not. Over time you can grow and overcome fears by learning to experience situations that make you feel anxious.

Be creative. Things that reduce or remove the cause of anxiety can be beneficial. Make a list of your ideas. Choose the best and most practical ideas for you. Then start making it happen.

Reduce avoidance

By avoiding situations that make you anxious, it will often increase your anxiety. While learning to manage (or stay in) these situations might feel uncomfortable in the short term, it can help you feel in control.

Plan to gradually do the things you usually avoid. Practice being in mildly anxiety-provoking situations. When you feel comfortable in this situation, work up to more challenging situations. For example, if you usually avoid being social, start small with people you trust.

If you fear a particular situation, such as going in a lift, make a list of different situations related to it from the least to most anxiety-provoking. This may include standing near a lift, standing in a lift with the doors open, going one floor in a glass lift, then one floor in an enclosed lift.

Start by doing the least anxiety-provoking situation for a few minutes each day, then slowly move up to the next level when you feel comfortable.

Use breathing techniques, positive self-talk (replacing unhelpful thoughts with more realistic ones), and other coping strategies to increase your confidence.

Thinking differently to reduce anxiety

Thinking strategies can help reduce anxiety. STOPP is a technique that can help you gain some control over your anxiety.



- S Stop** - pause for a moment.

- T Take a breath** - notice how you are breathing and try slowing it down.

- O Observe** - notice what you are thinking, focussing on, and reacting to.

- P Pull back** - think about the bigger picture.

- P Practice what works** - what is the best thing for me to do right now in this situation?

Reflect on your thinking

- › What are you reacting to?
- › What do you think is going to happen? What is the worst (and best) that could happen? What's most likely to happen?
- › Are you overthinking and getting things out of proportion? How important is this really? Will it be in 6 months?
- › Are you overestimating the danger and underestimating your ability to cope?
- › Are you mind-reading what others might be thinking?
- › Are you putting more pressure on yourself than you need to?
- › Do you think you can predict the future?

Think of helpful alternatives

- › Can you look at this another way?
- › What advice would you give someone else in this situation?
- › What do you want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from you? Is there a compromise?
- › What would be the consequences of responding the way you usually do?
- › Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and useful action for you to take (for yourself, the situation, and others)?
- › What would it look like if you coped well with the situation?

The physical sensations of anxiety

The physical sensations of anxiety can be distressing but won't really hurt you. Don't fight or resist the feelings. Let them flow through and past you.

- › Focus your attention elsewhere. What are five things you can see? Four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste?
- › Focus your senses on other things to ground you and settle the physical sensations over time.
- › Practice calming or mindful breathing. This will help reduce the physical sensations, intensity of thoughts, and feelings. See www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm

Keep going

Practice doing things differently. Over time this will become a habit that reduces your anxiety. Acknowledge and celebrate your wins. Persist with positive and healthy behaviours that help you gain confidence in your ability to manage anxiety.

Further support and information

Support

- › If you feel stressed, anxious, overwhelmed or just want to talk to someone, call or text **1737**.
- › Anxiety NZ offers information, resources, and a 24/7 helpline. **0800 269 4389** | www.anxiety.org.nz
- › The Lowdown has information on anxiety, self-help resources and a free 24/7 helpline. **0800 111 757** or text: **5626** | <https://thelowdown.co.nz>
- › Depression.org.nz offers advice, support and information on depression and anxiety | depression.org.nz
 - ▶ For Māori | <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/your-identity/maori/>
 - ▶ For Pasifika peoples | <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/your-identity/pasifika/>
 - ▶ For people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment | <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/your-identity/deaf/>
 - ▶ For people who live rurally | <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/your-identity/rural/>
 - ▶ For men's services | <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/your-identity/men/>
 - ▶ For LBTTQIA+ people | <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/your-identity/lgbti/>
- › OUTline provides free confidential and specialist phone counselling for people who identify as LBTTQIA+. **0800 688 5463**
- › Aunty Dee provides a free online tool to help people work through problems to generate ideas and find solutions. Although aimed at young Pasifika and Māori people aged 14-25 years, anyone can use the tool. <https://www.auntydee.co.nz/>
- › Staying on Track is an e-therapy course that teaches practical strategies to cope with stress and disruption of day-to-day life | <https://www.justathought.co.nz>
- › If you are worried about how anxiety affects your life, talk to your GP or health professional for help and information.

Information

- › Health Navigator NZ offers information, advice, and self-help resources for people experiencing anxiety | <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/a/anxiety/>
- › The Ministry of Health offers a directory of general wellbeing information and tools. | <https://www.health.govt.nz>
- › The Ministry of Health allows access to certain health websites without incurring mobile data charges. See below for a list. | <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/digital-health/other-digital-health-initiatives/sponsored-data>
- › MH101 by Blueprint for Learning is a one-day workshop for everyone designed to increase awareness and reduce the stigma associated with mental health challenges. They offer both online and in person workshops. | <https://www.blueprint.co.nz/workshops/4-mh101/>
- › Te Hikuwai – Resources for wellbeing provides information on a range of topics from anxiety, depression, cannabis, and alcohol to sleep, stress, relaxation, and wellbeing | <https://www.tepou.co.nz/tehikuwai>

Apps

- › Smiling Mind is a free app that helps with mindfulness, sleep, and stress | <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/thrive-inside>
- › Mentemia is a free app that can help you monitor, manage, and improve your mental wellbeing. You can set up daily goals and track your progress | <https://www.mentemia.com/nz/home>
- › Clearhead offers free 24/7 support and advice through your phone as well as resources, videos, and wellbeing plans | <https://www.clearhead.org.nz/>
- › Melon is a free app with self-help tools to help manage emotional wellbeing | <https://www.melonhealth.com>
- › Manaaki ora app by Te Rau Ora and the Centre for Māori Suicide Prevention is a free tool offering guidance and tips on how to support your wellbeing or support someone else going through difficult times | <https://terauora.com/news/self-help-wellbeing-app-launched-to-support-maori-experiencing-mental-distress/>
- › Headspace is a subscription-based app that provides guided meditation, reminders, and trackers to help you relax and be mindful | <https://www.headspace.com/>

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Take smalls steps to achieve your goals

