

Recommended resources

Books

- The Huge Bag of Worries, by Virginia Ironside (2004)
- Helping your anxious child: A step by step guide for parents, by Ronald M. Rapee (2009)
- What to do when you dread your bed: a kid's guide to overcoming problems with sleep, by Dawn Huebner (2008)
- Sitting still like a frog: Mindfulness exercises for kids and their parents, by Eline Snel (2013)

Websites

www.anxietybc.com
www.youngminds.org.uk

Apps

Search on Google Play or the Apple app store:

- BASE, provided by Solent NHS Foundation Trust
- SAM, provided by the University of the West of England
- Smiling Mind
- Headspace (good for teenagers)

Contact us

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If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.

www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital

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Managing worries about sleep

Information for patients, parents and guardians

Many young people who have trouble getting to sleep also experience anxiety, which is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease. This factsheet talks about the body's reaction to worry, which can at times make getting to sleep especially difficult. It includes some tips on things you can do to help.

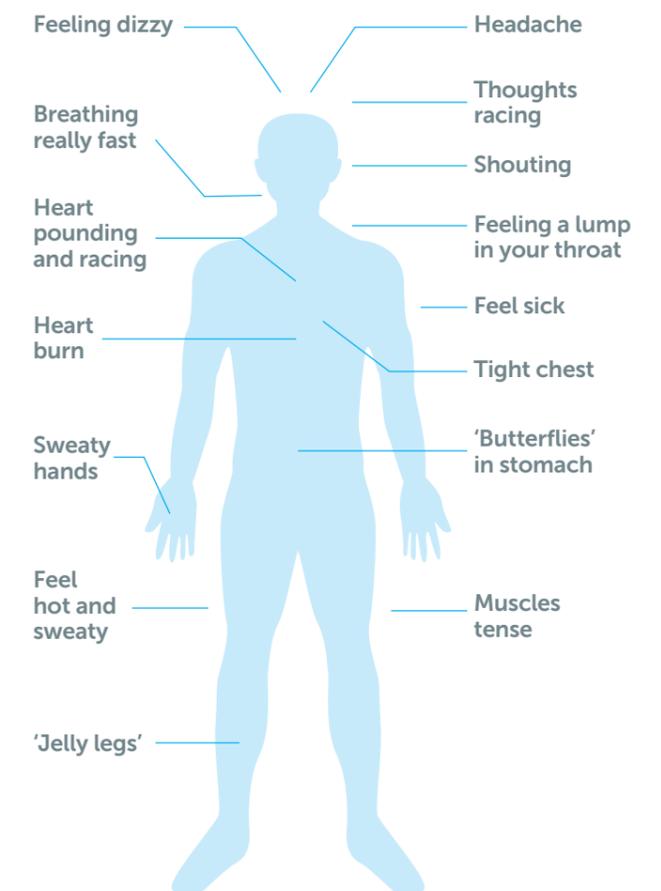
What is anxiety?

'Fight or flight'

Stress or anxiety occurs if our brain thinks we might be in danger. The body's natural reaction is to get ready to 'fight' or 'flight' (run away). This is also known as a stress response, and has been human nature since the days of cavemen and dinosaurs.

However, stress or anxiety can sometimes be triggered when there is no actual danger. For example, a person who is scared of spiders might react as if a spider is dangerous, even though the spider cannot hurt them. This is a false alarm!

Lots of things happen in our bodies during the 'fight or flight' response. These are caused by the central nervous system telling the body to get ready to fight or to run away from the danger.



The link between anxiety and not sleeping

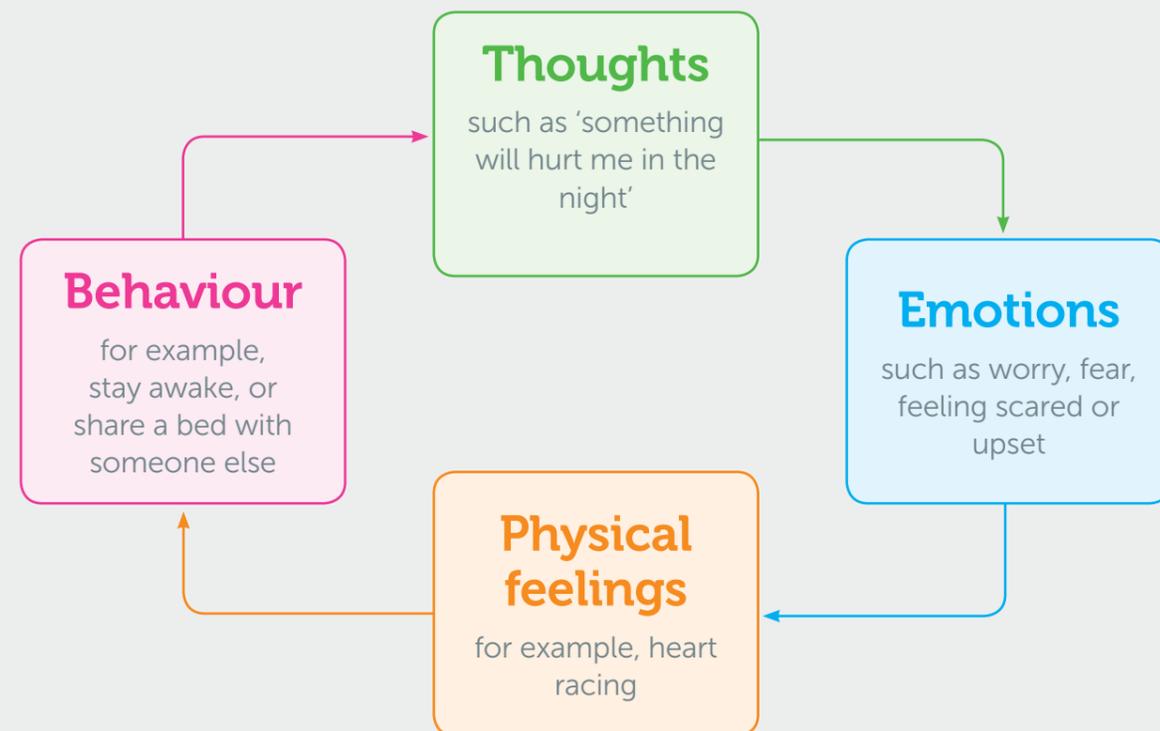
Many young people get worried sometimes, and this is normal. There are some common worries that many young people who struggle to sleep can have. These may include worries about the dark, worries about school the next day, worries about not getting enough sleep and feeling tired the next day.

Body reaction to worry and sleep

The worry reaction in our bodies can get our bodies ready for action (for a 'fight' or 'flight'). For example, worry can make our heart beat faster, make us feel hot and sweaty, need the toilet and maybe feel sick. When these worries happen it can make it hard for us to relax and fall asleep.

The anxiety cycle

There are four main parts to worry: thoughts, emotions, physical feelings and behaviour. They all affect each other, so changing any one part will change the others.



Ways to manage worry

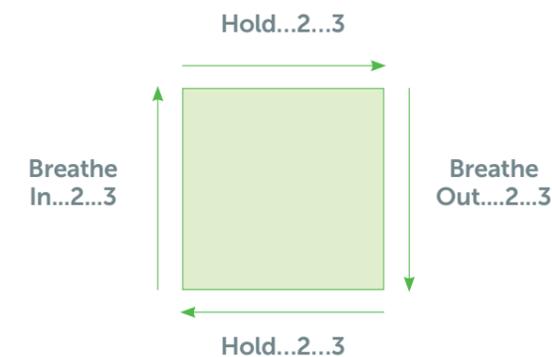
Relaxation techniques are a way of managing your feelings. They cancel out the 'fight or flight' response, so the body no longer acts as if it is in danger. They also reverse the physical feelings (for example, the heart beating faster), so the body can gradually stop the 'fight or flight' response. When relaxation techniques are practised and used regularly, they will change thoughts, feelings and behaviour, breaking the cycle of stress or anxiety.

Square breathing

Slowing down your breathing can be a really good way of helping the muscles in our bodies to relax. This can reduce the 'fight or flight' response to false alarms.

Step one: Sit or lie comfortably. You can close your eyes or keep them open – whatever feels better for you.

Step two: Repeat the square three times or until you feel relaxed. Some people find it helpful to imagine the tension flowing out of their body as they 'breathe out...2...3'.



The worry box

If you have lots of worries on your mind you could write them down on a piece of paper and put this in a box next to your bed. This will keep the worries safe overnight. You can then look at them the next day and talk them through with your friends or family.

Distraction

Distraction forces your brain to think about other things, so there is less space left for stress or worry. Distraction is a great way to stop your brain from focussing on negative thoughts and take your attention away from stress or danger.

- Count the number of red things you can see in the room
- Make a list of your five favourite films/songs/TV programmes
- Try and remember the words to your favourite song
- Imagine the line up of a football team
- Visualise your favourite holiday or memory

Positive self talk

Sometimes it helps to remind yourself of your strengths and what helps you to cope with worry. You could write these on a piece of paper and keep it in your pocket, to look at when you are worried.

These are really personal things, so it might help to talk to a friend, member of your family or teacher to try and work out what your positive self talk could be.

Other people have used statements like:

- 'I stayed calm before, I can stay calm again'
- 'It's just the worry telling me that I'm in danger'
- 'I won't always feel like this, the feelings will pass...'