

Yellow
Brick
Road



Letting anxiety go

For whānau of people with
mental health challenges

Are you concerned a loved one may be experiencing anxiety?

We all experience feelings of anxiety but sometimes it can be overwhelming. Our feelings may range from being a bit uneasy to a continuing sense of dread, or feeling panicky and frightened.

While some level of anxiety is normal, it can be too high for us to get on with everyday life and can develop into an anxiety disorder.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We're here to help you and your loved ones get the mental health support they need.

Why do we feel anxious and what causes it?

Anxious feelings result from our body's natural responses to danger or perceived danger.

While our ancestors had to worry about life-threatening dangers such as being chased by wild animals, our dangers are often of a less physical nature and less threatening.

Despite that, our brain reacts in the same way it used to. When it senses danger (real or perceived), it causes symptoms and feelings that we would describe as anxiety.

How do you recognise anxiety?

We feel the effects of anxiety in three main ways:

1. Physical effects:

- ➔ Racing or pounding heart
- ➔ Sweating
- ➔ Breathlessness
- ➔ Dizziness
- ➔ Shaking or trembling
- ➔ Chest pain or tightness
- ➔ Nausea and stomach pain

2. Thoughts:

- ➔ Repetitive thoughts that often escalate
- ➔ Fixed views of a situation, that may have little relation to reality

3. Behaviour:

- ➔ We withdraw or avoid situations

The different types of anxiety disorder

1. Generalised anxiety disorder

This chronic disorder involves excessive, long-lasting anxiety and worries about non-specific life events, objects, and situations.

It is the most common anxiety disorder, and people with the disorder are not always able to identify the cause of their anxiety.

While a number of different diagnoses constitute anxiety disorders, the symptoms of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) will often include the following:

- Restlessness and a feeling of being on edge
- Uncontrollable feelings of worry
- Increased irritability
- Concentration difficulties
- Sleep difficulties, such as problems falling or staying asleep

While these symptoms might be normal to experience in daily life, people with GAD will experience them to persistent or extreme levels.

GAD may present as vague, unsettling worry or a more severe anxiety that disrupts day-to-day living.

2. Panic disorder

Brief or sudden attacks of intense terror and apprehension characterise panic disorder. These attacks can lead to shaking, confusion, dizziness, nausea, and breathing difficulties.

Panic attacks tend to occur and escalate rapidly, peaking after 10 minutes. However, a panic attack might last for hours.

Panic disorders usually occur after frightening experiences or prolonged stress but may also occur without a trigger.

3. Specific phobia

This is an irrational fear and avoidance of a particular object or situation. Phobias are not like other anxiety disorders, as they relate to a specific cause.

A person with a phobia might acknowledge a fear as illogical or extreme but remain unable to control feelings of anxiety around the trigger.

4. Agoraphobia, social anxiety disorder, or social phobia

This can involve fear and avoidance of places, events, or situations from which it may be difficult to escape, or in which help would not be available if trapped.

It also includes fear of negative judgment from others in social situations, or of public embarrassment.

Social anxiety disorder includes a range of feelings, such as stage fright, a fear of intimacy, and

anxiety around humiliation and rejection.

This disorder can cause people to avoid public situations and human contact to the point that everyday living is rendered extremely difficult.

5. Separation anxiety disorder

This involves high levels of anxiety after separation from a person or place that provides feelings of security or safety. Separation might sometimes result in panic symptoms.



What causes anxiety disorders?

The causes of anxiety disorders are complicated. Many might occur at once, some may lead to others, and some might not lead to an anxiety disorder unless another is present.

Possible causes may include environmental stressors, genetics, medical factors, brain chemistry, withdrawal from substances and trauma.

How are anxiety disorders treated?

Treatments consist of a combination of psychotherapy, behavioural therapy, and medication.

Alcohol dependence, depression, or other conditions can sometimes have such a strong effect on mental wellbeing that treating an anxiety disorder must wait until any underlying conditions are brought under control.

Can you treat anxiety at home?

In some cases, a person can treat an anxiety disorder at home without clinical supervision. However, this may not be effective for severe or long-term anxiety disorders.

There are several exercises and actions to help a person cope with milder, more focused, or shorter-term anxiety disorders, including:

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Learning to manage stress can help limit potential triggers. Organise any upcoming pressures and deadlines, compile lists to make daunting tasks more manageable, and commit to taking time off from study or work.

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Talk with familiar people who are supportive, such as a family member or friend. Support group services may also be available in the local area and online.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Simple activities can help soothe the mental and physical signs of anxiety. These techniques include meditation, deep breathing exercises, long baths, resting in the dark and yoga.

COUNSELLING

A standard way of treating anxiety is psychological counselling. This can include cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), psychotherapy, or a combination of therapies.

EXERCISE

Physical exertion can improve self-image and release chemicals in the brain that trigger positive feelings.

MEDICATIONS

You can support anxiety management with several types of medication. Medicines that might control some of the physical and mental symptoms include antidepressants, benzodiazepines, tricyclics, and beta-blockers.

An exercise to replace negative thoughts with positive ones

1. Make a list of the negative thoughts that might be cycling as a result of anxiety.

2. Write down another list next to it containing positive, believable thoughts to replace them.

3. Use this list to help you turn your negative thoughts into more positive ones when you feel anxious.

4. Creating a mental image of successfully facing and conquering a specific fear can also provide benefits if anxiety symptoms relate to a specific cause, such as a phobia.

Can you prevent anxiety?

There are ways to reduce the risk of anxiety disorders. Remember that anxious feelings are a natural factor of daily life and experiencing them does not always indicate the presence of an anxiety disorder.

You can take the following steps to help moderate anxious emotions:

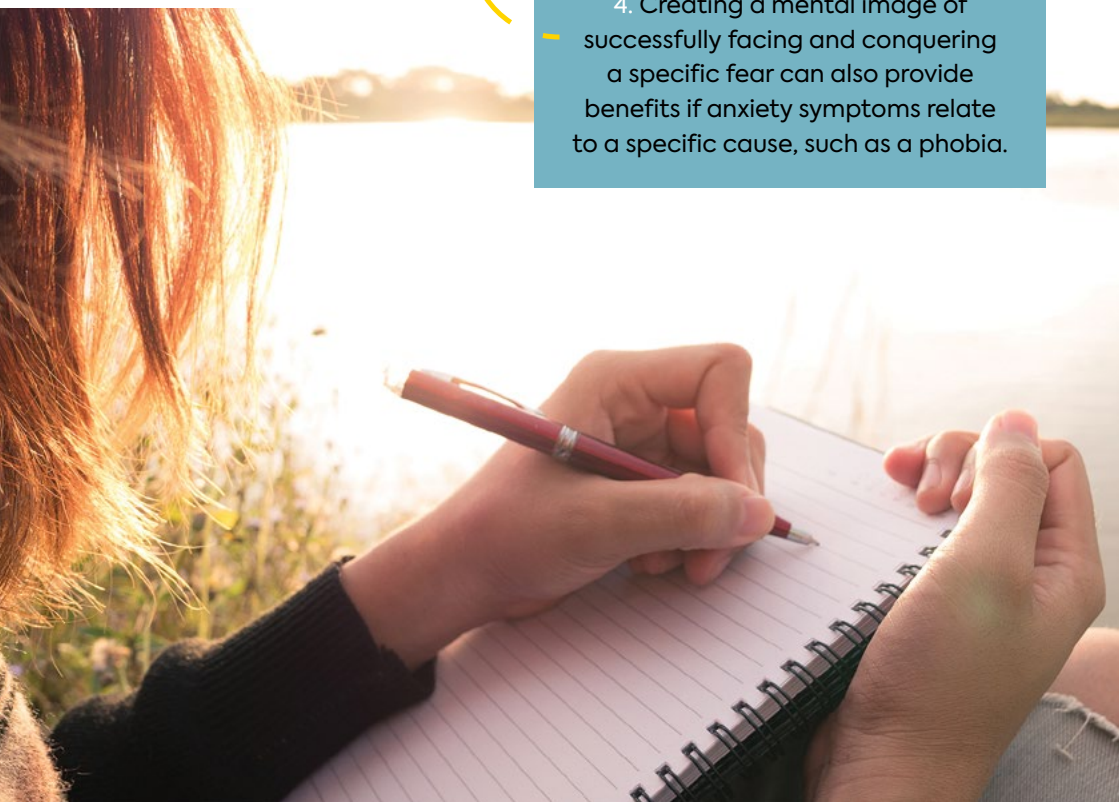
- Reduce intake of caffeine, tea, sugar and chocolate.
- Before using over-the-counter or herbal remedies, check with a doctor or pharmacist for any chemicals that may make anxiety symptoms worse.
- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Keep a regular sleep pattern.
- Avoid alcohol, cannabis, and other recreational drugs.

How can you support a loved one who has anxiety?

The first step to supporting a loved one experiencing anxiety is realising anxiety manifests in different ways. It is best to work in partnership with your family member to understand how their anxiety shows up.

Then you can find ways to make use of any insight they have into their anxiety. Remember:

- You don't have to have all the answers. Just be present and listen.
- Offer support, but don't take over.
- If someone has a more serious anxiety problem, seek professional guidance.
- Take care of yourself too.



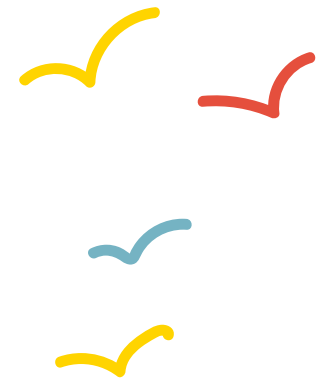
How Yellow Brick Road can help you

Every day we set out to ensure whānau feel listened to, supported, equipped and ultimately confident to overcome the challenges they face.

If you are concerned about a whānau member experiencing anxiety, our whānau support workers can help you by providing support, information, education and advocacy services, such as:

- Listening to your concerns and questions
- Creating an action plan to help your loved one throughout their recovery
- Providing books, articles and information about locally-available services
- Support groups

Our services are free and confidential. Contact us today to find out more.



**It takes each of us to make
a difference for all of us.**

**It's whānau ora, and it is the
foundation that inspires every
aspect of our work.**

Yellow Brick Road is a national organisation that specialises in providing support for whānau who have a loved one experiencing mental health challenges.

After 40 years of experience working with people around New Zealand, we know that if the family of a loved one experiencing mental distress are correctly supported and empowered, the path they walk leads to increased wellbeing for the whole whānau.

Positive change is our singular focus. By working together, we can help you thrive.



Supporting families
towards mental wellbeing

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South Island

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