

## Patient information

### **Anxiety Information**

#### Clinical Psychology Service

Anxiety is a natural human feeling of worry and fear about things that are about to happen or we think could happen. It can be experienced through thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations.

Anxiety can look and feel different for everyone, here are some symptoms you may be experiencing:

- Feeling restless or worried
- Having troubled concentrating or sleeping
- Dizziness or heart palpitations

#### **Why does this happen?**

Your body has an automatic response to any potential danger called the “fight or flight” response. Originally, this bodily sensation was used to help cave people survive physical danger. However, our brains and bodies still react in the same way even if we don’t face the same dangers today.

As well as our body reacting to triggers, we also have automatic thoughts that come out of nowhere and are often irrational. These thoughts, feelings and physical sensations can stop us from doing things such as attending appointments.

#### **‘Scanxiety’**

Having scans and tests can sometimes cause lots of worry, emotional stress and even anxiety. This is a completely normal and valid feeling to have about your upcoming cancer scans and tests.

“Scanxiety” is a term described by patients who experience a common feeling of stress and worry that accompany radiology appointments.

Not all patients experience “scanxiety”, but it is a common feeling for many. There could be other reasons you are feeling anxious such as the feeling of not being in control or the uncertainty of the results from the scan.

For others it could be worries related to being in the scanner. You may even want to avoid or skip your scans because of this feeling.

## **Ideas about what you can do**

### **Plan ahead:**

- Make a plan before you arrive – who's coming with you.
- Check out parking.
- Can you distract yourself the day before with activities?
- Educate yourself on what happens at scans if this is helpful for you.
- Find out when your results will be back to minimise uncertainty.
- In the waiting area use distraction techniques: puzzles, watching the TV, reading, phone apps, games or colouring.

### **During the appointment:**

- Use Techniques such as: Grounding, Breathing Techniques, Imagery (If appropriate)
- Self-talk – Be compassionate: "It's okay, I'm doing the best I can".
- Use Sensory support: Music, eye mask, blanket, headphones (If appropriate)

### **After the appointment:**

- Process it – with friends, by yourself in a journal.
- Leave behind what ifs : Unhelpful thinking (See resource list).
- Use imagery, drawing or relaxation.

## **Techniques**

Here are some examples of techniques that may be useful during consultations, waiting areas, during scans or at home. Not all techniques will be appropriate at all times but its about seeing what works for you and having a variety to choose from.

### **Grounding - 5-4-3-2-1 method**

Working backward from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. For example, you might start by listing: 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

### **Breathing - Box/Square**

Slowly inhale, then exhale. If it helps, you can say or think "in" and "out" with each breath. Feel each breath filling your lungs and note how it feels to push it back out. Try to breathe from your stomach. Now try Breathing In for 4, Hold for 4, Breathing Out for 4, Hold for 4.

Do this until you feel calmer.

## **Imagery - Calm Place**

What do you find soothing; outside, inside, beaches, mountains, parks, specific places. Close your eyes and imagine that you are there – recreate the memory of sights, sounds, smells. Imagine you are there and completely at ease, free to be yourself.

## **Additional support**

We know that some individuals with additional needs such as Autism, Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder may need extra support. We also know some individuals may find this experience more anxiety provoking due to a history of past trauma. Please make us aware of your additional needs so we can do our best to adapt and make reasonable adjustments.

**Communication cards** - Can be used if you find letting someone know difficult to say out loud. Scan the QR code below to access these cards.



## **Other resources**

Scan the QR codes below to access the resources.

### **Mindfulness**



### **Anxiety self-help resources**



## How to cope with panic attacks



## Unhelpful thinking



## Cancer Research UK Anxiety support



## Meditation



## Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

## Further information

### The Macmillan Support Line

**Free, confidential support to people living with cancer and their loved ones. If you need to talk, we'll listen.**

**Call us on 0808 808 00 00 (8am to 8pm).  
It's free to call from landlines and mobiles within the UK.**

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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