

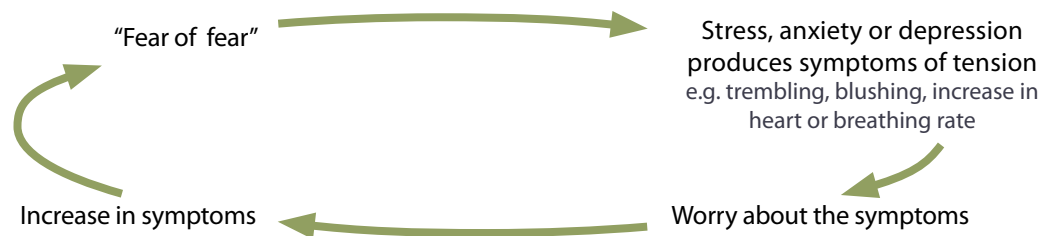
Distraction

Thinking about your symptoms tends to make them worse. It reminds you how unpleasant they are and therefore increases the fear that you will have symptoms (the 'fear of fear').

Fear of fear can both provoke symptoms of anxiety and prevent anxiety already present from dying down. This in turn produces more worry which leads to a 'vicious circle' that can spiral upwards into a panic attack – see *separate leaflet on 'Panic Attacks'*.



This 'vicious circle' is shown in the diagram below:



If, on the other hand, you do not let yourself pay attention to your symptoms, or worry about whether you will have them, they are then less likely to increase in a vicious circle. The fear of fear will not be so great so you will not be so distressed, the 'vicious circle' will not be created and the anxiety may then die away of its own accord, though you may still need to tackle the underlying cause of the symptoms to break the cycle completely.

It is very difficult just to turn your attention away from unpleasant feelings and the thoughts that go with them, but you may find this easier if you try the 3 steps below:

1. Accept that you may not be able to change the thoughts or drive them away...
2. Instead, make a conscious choice NOT to think about them, then choose to...
3. Fill your mind with something else, or DISTRACT yourself mentally or physically as described further down...

There are many ways in which you can distract yourself. All of them involve taking your mind off the problem and occupying yourself with something else.

Some of the activities others have found useful include:

1. Focusing on what is happening round about you. For example, you could listen to someone else's conversation, or look for people with curly hair or beards etc. When distracting yourself in this way it helps to give yourself a specific task, like guessing what job people do, or deciding what you would buy in each shop window. Focusing on the outside world will help you to stop thinking about what is going on inside your head.
2. Mental activity. This includes activities such as doing mental arithmetic, calculating prices, reciting a poem to yourself, or doing a crossword puzzle or sudoku.
3. Physical activity. Keeping yourself physically occupied is a good way to distract you from worrying. Possible activities range from doing some gardening, washing the car, playing a game with the children, going for a short or long walk, handing food and drinks round at a party or going for a bike ride.
4. If possible, choose to distract yourself with something you enjoy or that involves mixing with other people, or preferably both.