

The Physical Effects of Anxiety

What happens when we are anxious...

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When we are anxious, our whole body gets ready for action. This is called the 'fight or flight' response — there is a separate leaflet about this, ask your guide if you want to find out more.

What is the point of fight or flight?

Fight or flight is a normal survival instinct which is meant to help us fight or run away when there is real danger – for example, if you see a lorry coming when you are crossing the road.

When can fight or flight be unhelpful for us?

It can be unhelpful if we get anxious over imagined dangers – for example, going shopping in a supermarket and thinking that people are looking at us and thinking negative thoughts.

What are the changes in our body when we are anxious?

When we are anxious, our body releases a hormone called adrenaline. These are some of the side-effects:

- Increased heartbeat
- Rapid breathing
- Sweating
- Butterflies in the stomach
- More sensitive hearing and sight
- Overbreathing (hyperventilating) – can lead to dizziness, a feeling of tightness in the chest and tingling hands and feet.

What long-term effects might these changes have?

A period of anxiety can leave us feeling mentally and physically exhausted. Also, anxiety can have other side-effects such as sleeping problems and irritability.

How do I know whether my symptoms are caused by anxiety?

Try keeping a daily diary and see whether they get worse when you are anxious and better when you are relaxed. Remember,

ANXIETY IS NORMAL, everyone gets anxious from time to time...

Anxiety is only a problem when it goes on for too long or becomes too severe.

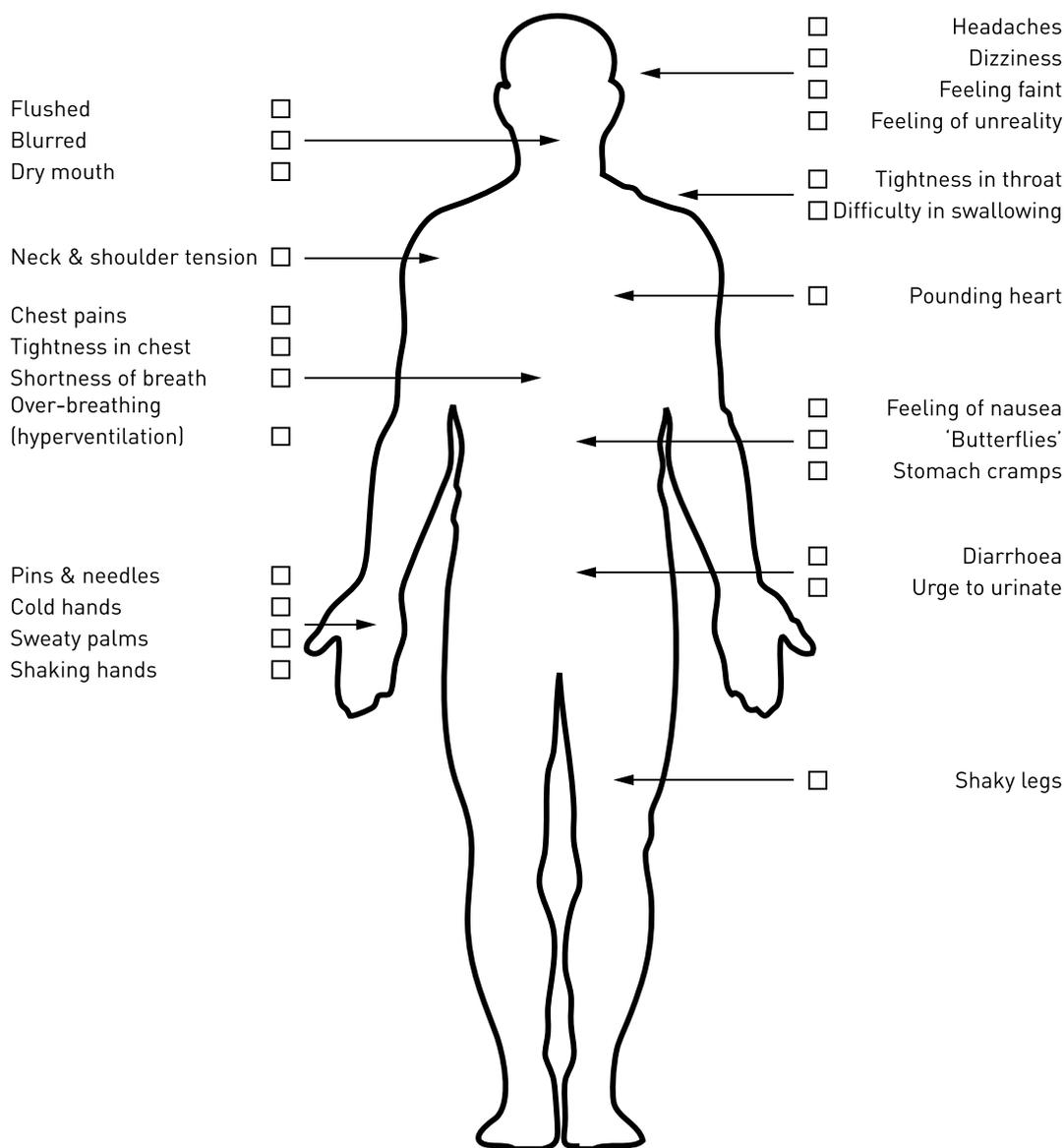
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Continued...

SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

This diagram shows some of the examples of the physical symptoms of anxiety.



Above are just some of the physical symptoms that we can experience when in a situation that provokes anxiety. You should tick all that apply to you when you are in a situation you find anxious, and add any more of your own. It may also be helpful for you to highlight those that are particularly uncomfortable or distressing.

For some people, an increase in the symptoms above can also lead to the experience of a panic attack.

Do you have any symptoms which aren't listed here?

Discuss them with your guide to work out if they are anxiety symptoms or something else.