

Top Tips for Managing Social Anxiety

Understand Your Anxiety

To overcome your social anxiety you need to better understand your triggers. Examples of triggers for social anxiety are: meeting new people, presentations, speaking to people of authority, being the focus of attention, making phone calls, speaking in meetings or tutorials, eating or drinking in public, or sitting exams. If you don't know your triggers, keep a diary for 2 weeks and note down any situations that make you feel anxious.

Identify Anxious Thoughts

Our thoughts affect how we feel and vice versa. When we're anxious we tend to have anxious thoughts, many of which aren't factual (even though they feel like they are). Sit down and write out the thoughts that make you feel anxious in social situations. If this is difficult, try carrying a diary with you to record why you felt anxious at the time that it happened. Everyone is different, but thoughts like "everyone will notice that I'm anxious and think I'm incompetent" or "people will think I'm boring" often play a role in social anxiety.

Manage Your Thoughts

When we're anxious we assume the worst and this increases our anxiety. Try to look at your thoughts objectively. Ask yourself: Am I certain that what I'm worried will happen actually will, or is it my anxiety that's making me feel like it will? How good am I at predicting outcomes? What happened last time I worried about this? Did the worst happen? Will people actually notice that I'm nervous? Even if they do notice, will they think I'm stupid?

Avoid Avoidance

When we're nervous we avoid whatever it is that's making us feel this way. Unfortunately while avoidance helps us to cope in the short-term, in the longer-term it actually makes anxiety worse.

As a general rule, do the opposite of what your anxiety tells you to do. If your anxiety tells you to miss a meeting, go to the meeting. If your anxiety tells you not to speak in meetings, aim to ask at least one question or to make at least one comment.

Make Lifestyle Changes

Keeping stress levels low will make your anxiety feel more manageable. Look at your work/life balance – do you have time for downtime or is your balance weighed more towards work and deadlines. Try to leave work at work and if you can't, figure out how to get a better balance.

Make time for regular exercise, it's a great way to manage stress and will also help to boost your immune system. Limit your caffeine intake. Caffeine is a stimulant and can exacerbate anxious symptoms

think TOP TIPS

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SOCIAL ANXIETY

It's normal to feel anxious before a job interview or a big work presentation, but social anxiety disorder makes someone worry about being judged negatively or doing something embarrassing to such an extent that it triggers high, sometimes paralyzing levels of anxiety.

Other symptoms of social anxiety are:

- **Persistent and uncontrollable worry about doing something embarrassing or negative judgements from others**
- **Fear and anxiety in the lead up to social situations**
- **Avoiding (or wanting to avoid) certain social situations**
- **Trying to make yourself invisible in social situations**
- **Feeling self-conscious in social situations**
- **Experiencing physical symptoms during or in anticipation of a social situation (e.g. racing heart, shaking)**

Unfortunately many of the ways people cope with social anxiety – like saying as little as possible in a social situation, avoiding eye contact – actually:

- **Make anxious symptoms worse**
- **Make symptoms more noticeable**
- **Interfere with performance**
- **Affect others perceptions (avoiding eye contact can appear rude)**

If you suffer from social anxiety, try these tips but also speak to your GP about a referral to a clinical psychologist.