What is Anxiety?

Everyone knows what it’s like to feel anxious. Indeed, most people feel anxious before a big or important event such as a wedding or an exam, having a ‘private’ meeting with the boss, or being pulled over for speeding. It’s also the way your heart races when you are in danger. Anxiety gears you up for action, to face a threatening situation, to study harder for that exam or to keep you on your toes with the boss. In general, it helps you cope.

However, when anxiety continues, it can have the opposite effect – it can get in the way of coping and interfere with how you live your life. Anxiety disorders can make you feel ‘on edge’ most of the time, without any noticeable reason. The feelings that geared you up before just don’t rest. You keep being wound up tighter and tighter. These feelings may make you so uncomfortable that you may even stop doing your normal everyday things. Sometimes these feelings can be so strong that they can terrify you and make you freeze up.

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental health problems, and the term covers a wide range of conditions. Anxiety disorders are not a character weakness or a matter of having a ‘bad case of nerves’. Feeling anxious is not your fault, it is not something you have brought upon yourself and is certainly not something to be ashamed of or to hide away from others who may be able to help you.

Feeling anxious is a serious problem that can affect your work, your family and your social life. People may also have problems working out the difference between feeling anxious and feeling depressed. Sometimes these go hand in hand, sometimes not - your doctor or mental health professional will explain all this.

What are the Signs?

Anxiety can present with a wide range of signs or symptoms, sometimes dependent upon the type of anxiety disorder that a person may have. However, some of the very basic signs may include:

- nausea
- chest pain or discomfort
- muscular aches, pains and headaches
- trembling, shaking or dizziness
- sweating
- feeling as if you are choking or having trouble breathing
- fearing that you are losing control or going crazy
- excessive worrying
- persistent thoughts about a particular situation or event.

These are only a few signs and the signs do vary. Some of these signs can also be symptoms of serious physical problems and it is important that you DO NOT assume that any of these are just anxiety - get them checked out by your doctor as soon as possible.
What can I do?

Today, we know a lot more about the causes and treatment of this problem. We also know that there are as many causes of anxiety disorders as there are people who have them. Anxiety can come from a variety of factors, and it is best to talk through your own situation with a doctor or mental health professional. The good news is that there is a range of treatment options available and you can start on the road to recovery by saying to yourself that today is a perfect time to seek help and start feeling better.

Anxiety related difficulties often respond very well to simple lifestyle changes and to changes to the way you think about yourself, your world and your life. It is also important to know that not all anxiety conditions need medication.

You may also like to use some of the following strategies to help yourself:
- maintain a healthy lifestyle - eat nutritious meals
- learn breath control and relaxation techniques
- limit your alcohol and caffeine intake
- try to ensure you get enough sleep
- get some regular exercise
- schedule time to relax or unwind.

Your local medical officer, psychologist, social worker or chaplain will be able to provide you with more ideas and techniques.

Where to seek help

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support. You can also contact your local ADF Health Centre, Mental Health Professional, Social Worker, Chaplain or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on 1800 628 036 or if calling from overseas +61 2 9425 3878.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call 1800 IMSICK to locate the nearest support.

Other Mental Health Resources

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608)
www.defence.gov.au/dco

The Defence Family Helpline is your first point of call for support, information and connection with your community. The Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

You can also email the Helpline on DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au and receive a response within 24 hours.

Chaplains are connected to all units in Australia and can provide support and appropriate referrals.

Lifeline (131 114). If you, or a friend, need to talk to someone about a problem immediately, you can call Lifeline for the cost of a local call.

Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS). This 24-hour service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families on 1800 011 046.