**Tips on how to manage anxiety**

**Identification of stress and trigger factors**

The first step in managing anxiety is to identify the specific situations that are making you stressed or anxious and when you are having trouble coping. One way to do this is to keep a diary of symptoms and what is happening when anxiety occurs. It is also helpful to identify any worrying thoughts as this can lead to finding ways to solve the specific problem that is of concern.

People tend to have a greater ability to manage stressful events than they sometimes realise. Once you have identified a specific situation that is causing the anxiety, problem-solving is a useful technique to help resolve anxiety by addressing the problem. Structured problem solving involves the following steps:

1. Identify the problem. When you have identified the situations that are contributing to your anxiety, write down the problem and be very specific in your description, including what is happening, where, how, with whom, why, and what you would like to change.
2. Come up with as many options as possible for solving the problem, and consider the likely chances that these will help you overcome your problem.
3. Select your preferred option.
4. Develop a plan for how to try out the option selected and then carry it out.
5. If this option does not solve the problem remember that there are other options to try.
6. Go back to the list and select your next preferred option.

**Breathing exercises**

When people feel anxious they often breathe more rapidly. This rapid breathing can lead to many of the unpleasant feelings such as light-headedness and confusion that may be experienced when anxious. Learning a breathing technique to slow down breathing can often relieve symptoms and help a person to think more clearly.

The following simple breathing technique can slow down breathing and reduce symptoms of anxiety. You should begin by timing your breathing and then complete the following steps.

* Breathe in through your nose to the count of three (3 seconds) and say to yourself: "IN, TWO, THREE".
* Breathe out through your nose, again counting to three, and say to yourself: "RELAX, TWO, THREE".
* Keep repeating this for two to three minutes, and then time your breathing.

This breathing technique can be used to slow down breathing whenever a person feels anxious and can be done anywhere without anyone else noticing.

**Relaxation techniques**

People who feel anxious most of the time report that they have trouble relaxing. Knowing how to release muscle tension is an important anxiety treatment. Relaxing can bring about a general feeling of calm, both physically and mentally. Learning a relaxation technique and practising it regularly can help a person to maintain a manageable level of anxiety. A psychologist or other health professional can teach you relaxation techniques or they can be self-taught by using books or CDs that guide you through the steps.

**Thought management**

Thought management exercises are useful when a person is troubled by ongoing or recurring distressing thoughts. There is a range of thought management techniques. For instance, gentle distraction using pleasant thoughts can help take attention away from unpleasant thoughts. Alternatively, one can learn ‘mindfulness techniques' to redirect attention from negative thinking. A simple technique is ‘thought replacement' or using coping statements. Develop a set of statements that will counteract worrying thoughts (e.g., "This is difficult but I have been through it before and have got through it okay", "Hang in there, this will not last much longer"). Substitute one of the reassuring or coping statements for the troubling thought. The choice of thought management technique will depend on the type of anxiety problem. A psychologist can help you decide on thought management strategies that are likely to be most helpful.

**Lifestyle changes**

* **Plan to take part in a pleasant activity each day.
This doesn't have to be something big or expensive as long as it is enjoyable and provides something to look forward to that will take your mind off your worries.**
* **Increase exercise.
Regular exercise will help to reduce anxiety by providing an outlet to let off stress that has been built up in your body.**
* **Reduce caffeine intake.
Caffeine is a stimulant and one of its side-effects is to keep us feeling alert and awake. It also produces the same physiological arousal response that is triggered when we are subjected to stress. Too much coffee will keep us tense, and aroused, leaving us more vulnerable to anxiety.**
* **Reduce alcohol intake.
Alcohol is frequently used to help deal with stress, anxiety and depression. However, too much alcohol leaves us more vulnerable to anxiety and depression.**
* **Improve time-management skills.
Having a busy lifestyle can add daily pressure to your life and serve to increase stress and anxiety. Much of this stress may be associated with poor time management. Plan and schedule time throughout the day but be prepared to be flexible. Ensure to plan some rest time and some leisure activities and be realistic about time limitations, not scheduling too much into the day.**