



connectme
special edition

Devon
County Council

Mental Health Awareness Week

Monday 15 May 2023

It's Mental Health Awareness Week, and this year's theme is anxiety.

We all feel anxious from time to time, it's a natural response to the uncertain world around us. But it's important that we recognise and respond when we feel anxious, so that our anxiety doesn't become overwhelming.

We've put together this special edition of our newsletter to highlight some of the causes of anxiety and share information to help prevent it from becoming a problem.



**We need to talk
about anxiety**

45% of people with feelings of anxiety
say they keep it a secret.

Let's break the silence.

#ToHelpMyAnxiety



What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, usually in response to feeling threatened, under pressure or stressed, and it can be mild or severe. Feeling anxious can be perfectly normal, and there are lots of reasons why we get this feeling. It can be connected to a job, school, a relationship, social situations, how we feel about ourselves, or a change in our life.

It isn't necessarily a bad thing as it can spur us on, help us stay alert, make us aware of risks and motivate us to solve problems. But some people find it hard to control their worries, and their feelings of anxiety are more constant and intense, so can often affect their daily lives.

Things like our genes, upbringing, environment and temperament all affect our mental health and influence how we think and respond to situations. External factors such as how well other parts of our life are going or how supported we feel also play a part. It means everyone's anxiety levels are different, and very personal. Some people find more situations stressful and experience more challenges in life than others, and they get more anxious as a result. Sometimes there are no obvious triggers for it and it's difficult to know what causes anxiety, which can be upsetting or stressful in itself.

Anxiety can affect both your body and your mind. Physiological (mental) symptoms can include feeling tense or nervous, finding it hard to relax, feeling tearful or irritable, having difficulty concentrating or problems sleeping. Physical symptoms can include restlessness, dizziness, increased heart rate, headaches, nausea, loss of appetite, breathlessness or chest pain.

You may also notice your behaviour changing, for example withdrawing from friends and family, unable to go to work or avoiding certain places. Some people with anxiety may appear to be fine on the outside while still having some of the symptoms as they have developed ways of hiding their anxiety so that other people don't notice it.



How can you help yourself?

If we don't know how to cope with our feelings of anxiety, they can get out of control and stop us from doing the things we need or want to do. The more often and the longer we feel anxious, the more it can become a problem.

Dealing with anxiety can be hard, but there are some things we can do to manage these tough feelings. As part of Devon Climate Emergency Partnership, our Public Health team has come up with some [suggestions on ways to improve your mental health](#), grouped around the '[five ways to wellbeing](#)', while also taking care of the planet.

Connect

Good relationships and connecting with others can help us feel like we belong and are valued. If you're looking for ways to an opportunity to share positive experiences, check out [Community Action Group \(CAG\) Devon](#) for inspiration and ways to get involved in everything from repair cafes, surplus food cafes and compost workshops to litter picks, jumble trails, and clothes swaps.

Be active

Being active is great for your physical health, and it can also boost your mood. If you want to build a little more movement into your daily life, changing the way you travel can bring benefits to your wellbeing and the

environment. [Visit the Travel Devon website](#) for top walking tips, local walking and cycling trails and car sharing opportunities.

Devon has a spectacular array of natural resources for getting and staying active and healthy. Take a look at [the Explore Devon website](#) for ideas on how to make the most of the county's beaches, shorelines and estuaries, the moors, parks and woodlands and visit the [Active Devon](#) website for fun, healthy and connected ways to get and stay active.

Learn

Feeling like you're learning and developing can improve your mental wellbeing by boosting your self-esteem. If you'd like to learn and understand what you can do about climate change and nature loss, with effective ways to reduce your carbon footprint, [visit the Devon Climate Emergency website for top tips.](#)

Give

Acts of giving and kindness can help improve your mental wellbeing by creating positive feelings and a sense of reward. It doesn't have to be money. Volunteering can be a good way to give, and even small amounts of time can make a difference to your community.

There are lots of [volunteering opportunities](#) available via the [Devon Local Nature Partnership](#), who work to restore Devon's natural environment. You can also find a wide range of other projects in your local community via [Devon Connect](#).

Recycling and reusing are ways to give back to the environment. Visit the [Recycle Devon website](#) for resources to help you reduce, reuse and recycle at home, in the garden and in schools.

Notice

Paying more attention to the present moment - your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you - can improve your mental wellbeing. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness".

May is [Devon's Naturally Healthy Month](#), encouraging people to get outside. Taking notice of the nature and wildlife around you while you are out and about is a good way to practice mindfulness.

The graphic features a light blue background with four categories of support at the top: 'One to one professional support' (orange dot), 'Community support' (teal dot), 'Helpful articles' (teal dot), and 'Self-he tools' (teal dot). Below these, several hands of different colors (dark blue, light blue, teal) hold up various digital devices: a smartphone with a messaging interface, a smartphone with two speech bubbles, an open book, and a smartphone with a landscape image. At the bottom, a teal banner contains the Qwell logo (a speech bubble with a white 'Q') and the text 'Sign up for free at Qwell.io'.

How can we help?

We are working as part of 'One Devon', a partnership of health and care organisations across the county, to improve the health, wellbeing and care of our communities.

There's no 'one-size fits all' approach to mental health care and it's not always easy for people to reach out and ask for the help they need. So we've commissioned a free and confidential digital mental health and wellbeing service for adults to access support on their own terms, and in a way they feel comfortable with.

It's called 'Qwell', and it's delivered by mental health provider Kooth. It offers a safe online space for adults to access therapeutic activities, content such as self-help articles and a peer support community via forums and discussion boards that are moderated by a team of qualified

practitioners who also offer a one-on-one live text chat and messaging counselling service.

Anyone over the age of 18 years old living in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay can access support from Qwell without a referral from a health professional. There is no criteria to qualify for support. To access the service, [just visit the Qwell website](#), enter your postcode and complete a short registration process.

Children and young adults aged 11 to 18 years old across Devon already have access to the professional support Kooth.com offers for emotional wellbeing and mental health. To find out more about Kooth, [visit their website](#).

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HOW CAN TALKING THERAPY HELP WITH ANXIETY?

#MENTALHEALTHAWARENESSWEEK

0300 555 3344
TALKWORKS.dpt.nhs.uk

What if you need more help?

If anxiety is severely affecting your everyday life, you should [contact your GP](#) who can offer additional support and help. No one should struggle alone.

There are different ways to treat and manage anxiety, and the right treatment for you will depend on your type of anxiety, how severe it is and your circumstances.

Your GP may offer you self-help resources such as workbooks or online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) courses. These are often available quite quickly and may be enough to help you feel better without trying other options.

You can also get free, [confidential talking therapy on the NHS in Devon through TALKWORKS](#). They offer 1-to-1 sessions with a therapist (available face-to-face at one of their [bases](#) across Devon, over the phone or by video call), [wellbeing workshops](#), group therapy sessions, [online self-help](#) (available 24 hours a day) and [live text-based therapy](#) (from 6am - 11pm, 7 days a week).

There are also different medications available to manage both the physical and psychological symptoms of anxiety. Talk to your GP about which one might be right for you.

Useful links

- Contact [Samaritans](#), call: [116 123](#) or email: jo@samaritans.org if you need someone to talk to
 - Consider peer support, where people use their experiences to help each other. [Find out more about peer support on the Mind website](#)
 - Listen to [free mental wellbeing audio guides](#)
 - [Mental Health Matters Devon](#) provides a 24 hour, 365 days a year mental health helpline by calling 0800 4700317.
 - Sign up to receive the [NHS Every Mind Matters anxiety-easing-emails](#) for expert advice and practical tips
 - Check out [Reading Well's list of books on mental health](#), which are available for free from your local library
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