



**BIRMINGHAM CITY**  
University

# ANXIETY

**BCU MENTAL  
HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING  
SERVICE**

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# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling that we all experience at some point in our life and is a word that is often used to describe when we feel worried, nervous, fearful or wound up.

We feel anxious when we perceive situations to be dangerous or risky and is our body's natural response to this, it usually passes after a while once the situation is over.

Anxiety can be beneficial in certain circumstances as it can improve our performance and can help us to cope better in stressful situations such as taking a test or doing a presentation.

Anxiety can affect us in four different ways and can affect :

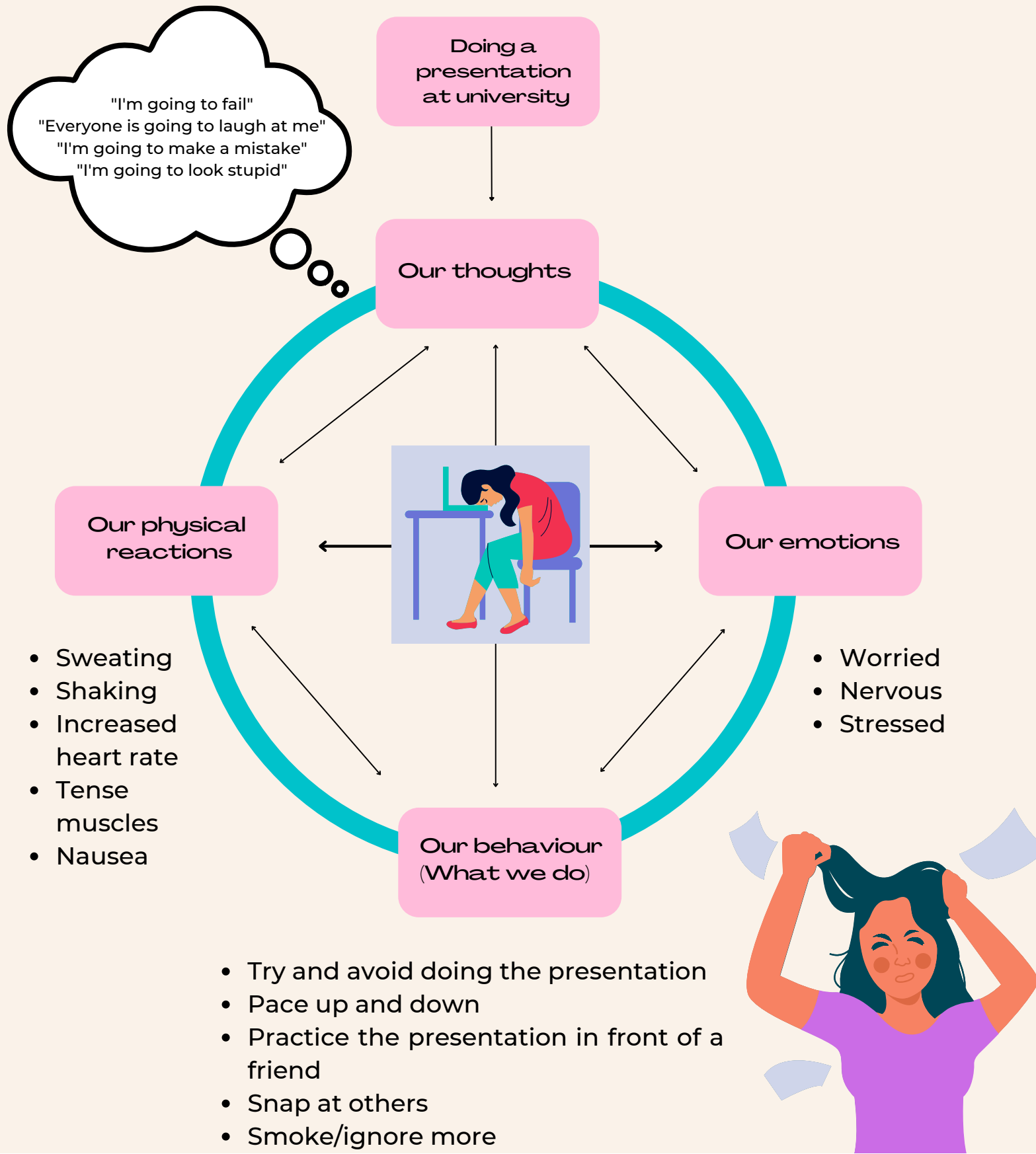
- 1) The way we **think**
- 2) The way we feel **emotionally**
- 3) Our **body**
- 4) The way that we **behave**

See below for more information on how anxiety can impact us – do you experience any of these symptoms?

How we think	How we feel emotionally	How our bodies respond	How we behave
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overthinking or ruminating</li> <li>Racing thoughts</li> <li>Excessive worrying or thoughts jumping from worry to worry</li> <li>Thinking 'what if' something bad happens</li> <li>Imagining the worst scenarios</li> <li>Looking out for danger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panicky</li> <li>Nervous</li> <li>Stressed</li> <li>Worried</li> <li>Frightened</li> <li>Scared</li> <li>On edge</li> <li>Irritable</li> <li>Uptight</li> <li>Tense</li> <li>Having little patience</li> <li>Detached</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nauseous</li> <li>Tense body or muscular pain</li> <li>Dizzy / faint / lightheaded</li> <li>Tight chest</li> <li>Difficulties breathing</li> <li>Increased or decreased heart rate</li> <li>Palpitations</li> <li>Sweating</li> <li>Increased need to go to the toilet</li> <li>Difficulties with concentrating / brain fog</li> <li>Numbness or tingling in body parts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoiding the situation which makes us feel anxious</li> <li>Difficulties in resting or relaxing</li> <li>Being on the go all of the time</li> <li>Irritable or snappy behaviour</li> <li>Anger outbursts</li> <li>Talking more quickly or avoiding talking</li> <li>Pacing up and down</li> <li>Turning to unhelpful coping mechanisms</li> </ul>

# ANXIETY IN ACTION: AN EXAMPLE

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# WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

We can develop anxiety due to our:

- **Early experiences:** Our early experiences can have a big impact on our anxiety levels. Individuals who grew up in an abusive household or who experienced or witnessed a lot of conflict may be more susceptible to anxiety.
- **Life events and stressors:** If we have experienced a series of life stressors such as financial difficulties, bereavement, relationship problems, bullying, physical illnesses, difficulties at work etc.
- **Biological causes:** If someone in your immediate family is an anxious person, there is an increased chance that you will have similar personality traits as anxiety and anxious worrying can also be learned.
- **Medication/lifestyle choices:** We may experience anxiety as a result of side effects of certain medications, drugs, alcohol and certain foods and drinks which are high in sugar.

This can also explain why some people feel more anxious than others.



# WHY DO WE HAVE ANXIETY?

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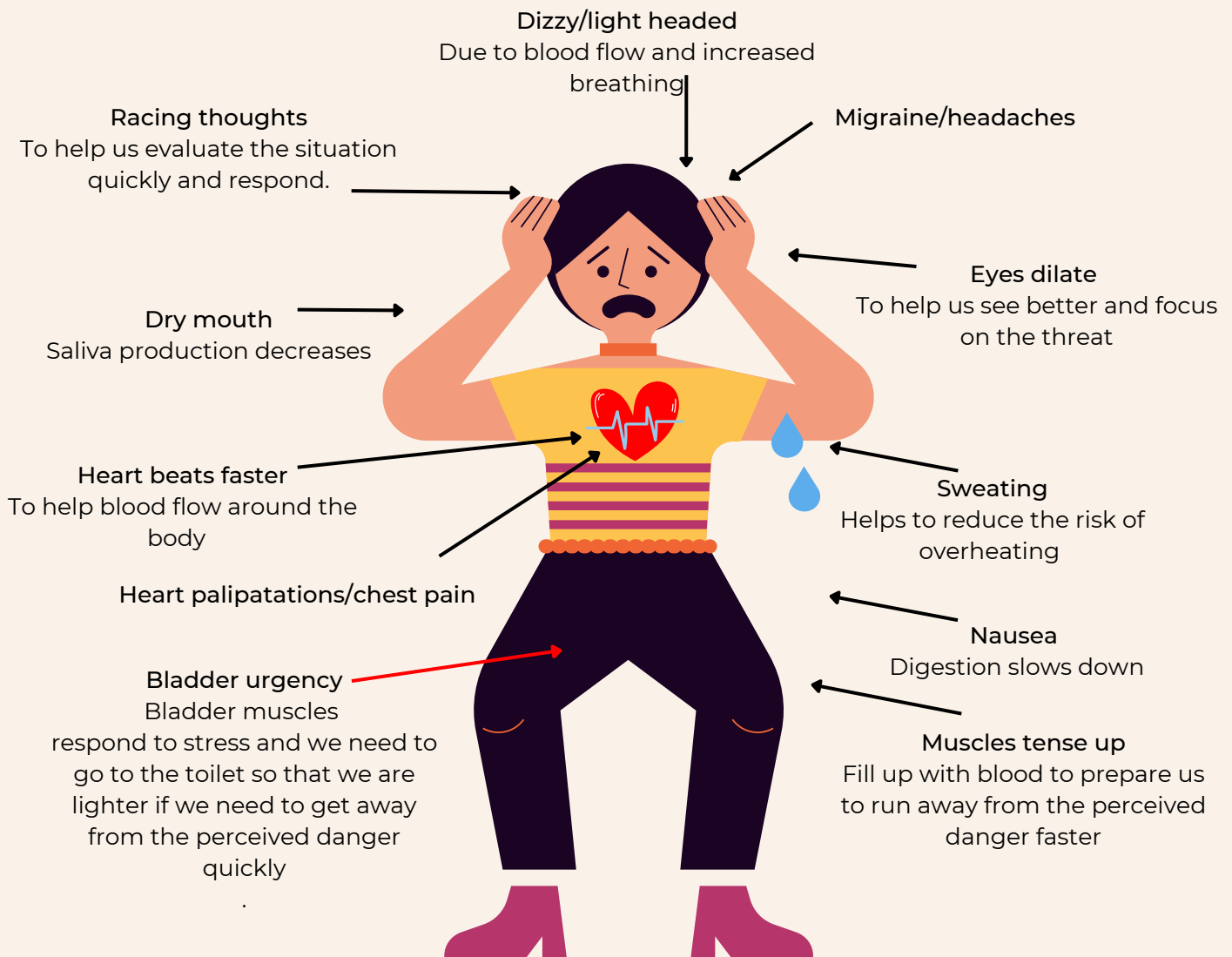
We have anxiety as it is innate it is our bodies way of keeping us safe.

It is a basic and automatic response so that we can respond quickly and allows us to protect ourselves from the perceived danger.

When we are anxious the fight or flight response is activated.

The fight or flight response is a survival mechanism that prepares you to either fight for survival or run away when you're threatened. In some situations you may freeze or faint.

Anxiety can have several affects on our body. Have you ever experienced any of these symptoms?



# WHAT KEEPS ANXIETY GOING?

There are instances where anxiety can develop into a longer-term problem and this can be maintained by:

- Experiencing ongoing stressors - this increase the likelihood of feeling anxious.
- Avoiding situations which already cause us anxiety also helps to keep anxiety going. Although avoiding these situations may provide short-term relief from anxiety, it can cause major difficulties long-term due to the increased perceived danger about the situation that is being avoided.
- Our thinking styles – if someone is an ‘anxious thinker’ its likely that they are in a habit of anxious thinking. ‘Worrying about worrying’ can cause a vicious cycle of anxious thinking patterns. Similarly, worrying about the physical sensations caused by anxiety can also keep us in a vicious cycle of anxiety.



## Being mindful of anxious thoughts.

Our anxious thoughts are usually predictions and we cannot know what is going to happen in the future.

We cannot know what is going to happen THIS TIME, even if things haven't gone as well as you had hoped before or in the past.

Often when we are anxious we have already decided what horrible/scary/embarrassing thing might happen to us and we think this over and over.

When this happens we feel more anxious, have more ‘threat system’ sensations and then as a result have more anxious thoughts (“I can’t cope with this”).

Our thinking styles can have a huge impact on our anxiety.



# ANXIETY THINKING STYLES

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Jumping to conclusions

"I am definitely going to fail"

Mind reading

"They think I'm incompetent"

All or nothing thinking

"If it doesn't go perfectly I will have failed"

Catastrophising

"I am going to get anxious, then have a panic attack, then fail the course, then lose my house" etc.



We all use these some of these styles of thinking even when we are not anxious however when our anxiety increases we use these styles more and more and can part of the vicious cycle.

It is useful to try and identify which ones you use most often so that you can look out for them.

Try to catch yourself thinking negatively/worrying and notice that you are doing it. Don't give yourself a hard time about it, but just remember they are **JUST THOUGHTS**.

You can choose whether to distract, challenge or observe these thoughts.

# ANXIETY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

We encourage all students to speak to their GP for further support if they are concerned about their anxiety. Below are some anxiety management strategies:

## CHALLENGE

Journaling can help by writing down your anxious thoughts and feelings.

Use problem solving to focus on solvable worries

Set a specific amount of time to focus on your worries

Keep a worry diary to help you track your triggers for anxiety

Talk to a friend or a family member for support

Speak to the BCU mental health and wellbeing team



## DISTRACT

Listen to music

Notice all of the blue things in the room you are in

(How many items, how many different shades of blue)

Take a walk and pay attention to all of the bright colours that you see

Be compassionate towards yourself and the anxious thoughts

Try breathing exercises

Use fidget toys

Stretching / yoga

## OBSERVE

Be compassionate towards yourself and the anxious thoughts

Try breathing exercises

Stretching / yoga

Mindfulness colouring

Painting



# USEFUL SERVICES

## Anxiety UK

Anxiety UK delivers a wide range of services including:

- Therapy service
- Helpline & text service
- Courses & Groups
- Calm Club

## Togetherall

Togetherall is an online space where you can access support if you're experiencing anxiety, depression and other common mental health issues.

## Student Minds

Empowers students and members of the university community to look after their own mental health, support others and create change.

## SAM App - Self-help for anxiety management

A non-profit, community-backed app to help you monitor and manage your mental health

### Specific faculty contacts

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# Speak to us!

BCU Mental Health & Wellbeing Team

Phone: 0121 331 5188

Email: [Sa.wellbeing@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Sa.wellbeing@bcu.ac.uk)

Twitter: [@BCUSupport](https://twitter.com/BCUSupport)

Instagram: [@BCU.Wellbeing](https://www.instagram.com/BCU.Wellbeing)

