

Hi. My name is Erin, and I am one of the counsellors at the ANU Counselling Centre. I'm going to talk about how we can use our behaviour and actions to overcome our anxiety. At times, addressing our anxious thoughts directly may not be enough on its own to manage the stress, and improving the way we approach anxiety provoking situations can often be the most important and helpful step.

Some people may find that they tend to do more when they are anxious, thinking that keeping themselves very busy will help lessen their stress. Whilst increased activity may be useful in the short term in lowering our anxiety as we achieve some goals and feel as though we are accomplishing tasks, as times go on, you may begin to feel overwhelmed by the amount of things in front of you and start to feel overworked and burnt out.

Some ways to address the inclination to overload yourself when you are anxious is firstly to check in to see if over activity is a problem for you. Two questions to ask yourself are, do you feel the need to be constantly busy, or do you find it hard to slow down, relax, and get more anxious when you have unplanned free time? If you answered Yes to these questions, it may be helpful to consider some of the following strategies of healthy behaviour to assist in lowering your anxiety and managing stress.

Make a list of ideas for backup or alternative activities you can engage in during unexpected free time which you find to be relaxing or enjoyable with a range of durations. Examples of such activities may be reading a book, going for a spontaneous walk, coffee, or movie, listening to a podcast, cooking, or photography. During an unexpected free time, choose one from your list to try. Try to see if you can engage in activities that are non-study or work related in order to provide space for recharging your brain's battery.

Do not do tasks that are not your responsibility. Sometimes allow others to contribute to tasks or help you, even if you believe they won't do it the way you would ideally do yourself. Trying to take on all the work is often very tiring and can increase our stress and anxiety more so than allowing others to share the load.

Practice doing small tasks imperfectly. It is common for us to want to do everything the right way and to a particular standard in order to feel we have some control over the situation when we are anxious about the activity or the result. Exposing yourself to do things imperfectly will be uncomfortable at first, but will help you relax more by reducing your focus on the unnecessary details. This also helps you to see that things will not fall apart if it isn't done as perfectly as you wish. Start small with things such as intentionally missing a spot when sweeping the floor, or leaving out a full stop in an essay. Whilst it may feel uncomfortable, we can use these experiences as evidence that the consequences of such mistakes are usually not as catastrophic as we predict.

Balancing your time is also very helpful. Using a diary, schedule, or pie chart to map out your time and keep track of how you are spending your day is a positive way to see what you were doing and where your focus is directed. Make sure you make space for the categories which are important to your functioning, including sleep, eating, exercise, socializing, work, study, hobbies, and so on.

Importantly, having fun and having a laugh can do wonders for our stress and anxiety levels. Practice laughing from your belly. Have some things on hand which will help lighten up your mood or mindset on days which may be particularly stressful. Having funny pictures,

messages, quotes, or videos you can easily access can be helpful in providing a moment of lightheartedness during times of increased pressure and stress. In order to best manage our anxiety at various points of our lives and in different situations, it is important to make a plan to practice our strategies on a regular basis so they become new healthy habits that are easily accessible when times get tough.

It is important to learn about anxiety. Learning about anxiety in general and what makes you personally anxious can help to unlearn the fear. If you can unlearn the fear through good coping experiences, you are more likely to see yourself as competent and confident in handling difficult situations the second time around. Becoming practiced at quick calming techniques, such as the breathing exercise outlined in anxiety part one, will help to address anxiety in the moment as it occurs.

Setting meaningful goals for your life and identifying skills you may need to achieve these can help build your confidence in overcoming anxiety provoking situations and pushing through the fears. Doing some investigating as to where and how you can learn skills associated with your goals and building on these through practice is a great step. Start firstly with small steps to approach your goals and practice it until you feel confident to try the next level. Think of this like climbing a ladder to your goal, with each new rung, a new skill, task, or activity to master on your way to success.

And most importantly, remind yourself that nothing is perfect. Setbacks are a normal part of the process and actually provide us with an opportunity to learn. Each time we face something new, we learn something about ourselves or our behaviour and are given a chance to use this as information about what to do or not do the next time around. Reflect on your experience and modify your approach for next time with this new information in hand. These skills require patience and determination. It may take time and practice, but gradually, you can build confidence in overcoming anxiety through your own efforts.

I hope you have found some of these tips useful. If you feel you would benefit from further information or assistance, you may find making an appointment with one of the counsellors at the ANU Counselling Centre to be helpful. You can make an appointment to see one of the counsellors, Monday to Friday, by calling 6125 2442, or attending the centre in person in the ANU Health Building, on the second floor.