

>>> worst recession in decades. A 2010 study at Roehampton University found that the number of people suffering from stress and anxiety because of redundancies, job insecurity and pay cuts owing to the recession has soared, with 52 per cent who had lost their jobs and 48 per cent who'd had a salary cut experiencing anxiety symptoms. This was particularly acute in the 18-30 age range.

WHAT WORKS?

Thankfully, help is available. The NHS recommends Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) - which focuses on how our thoughts translate into feelings and behaviour - as an effective treatment for anxiety. Lidbetter backs this up and says many Anxiety UK members have benefitted from CBT, as it can help them understand that while they can't control every aspect of the world around them, 'they can control how they interpret and deal with such things'.

A 2011 study described CBT as the 'gold standard' in the treatment of anxiety. This is because it tackles a range of distorted thinking patterns - such as 'all-or-nothing' thinking, overgeneralisation and catastrophising, which can turn everyday setbacks into mammoth fears. It introduces the possibility that the thoughts you take for granted and act upon may be incorrect in some way, and helps you rethink your reaction.

For example, an anxious person who gets nervous in crowded social situations might be asked to keep a record of negative thoughts, feelings and actions when in a crowd. Then a therapist may look at the thoughts, actions and feelings with them and help them cope better. Dr Hallström says there is a 50 per cent improvement overall for those who begin treatments, but he adds: 'It's important that patients persist with treatment and do their homework.'

Many anxious people are fearful of

using medication, but Dr Drever says that 'short term, medication can be used, either to "put out the immediate fire" or to help diminish the intensity of the background level of anxiety'.

A new anxiety drug on the market called Lyrica works by reducing the release of 'nerve-exciting' neurotransmitters in the brain including glutamate, substance P and noradrenaline. Dr Hallström says it 'seems to be non-addictive, but effective.'

A newer method, MBCT (mindfulness-based cognitive therapy), a variation on CBT, has been linked in studies to a substantial reduction in anxiety symptoms. MBCT uses mindfulness, which is about becoming aware of thoughts and feelings and learning to accept them without reacting to them. While CBT tries to change distorted

thinking, MBCT aims to change only the way a person relates to their thoughts - a kind of 'going with the flow'. As Ruby Wax writes in *Sane New World: Taming The Mind* (Hodder & Stoughton, £18.99), 'Mindfulness is not complicated, it's what we can all do - notice things.'

My therapist has taught me mindfulness techniques that help when I start to get anxious or 'extrapolate' - projecting my thoughts forward in time and imagining the very worst. I keep in the moment by putting the word 'now' in front of everything: 'Now I'm getting my key out', 'Now I'm putting it in the lock', 'Now I'm opening my door'. Concentrating on such pedestrian activities takes me out of the anxiety orbit, which tends to be about what I fear is going to happen. Simple but effective, like many other antidotes to anxiety.

TRY THESE TRICKS

1 BE MINDFUL

Ruby Wax suggests this in her book: if your emotions get too hot, switch your attention elsewhere. Try not to pick something that will harm you - such as drugs, comfort eating or shopping.

- Count back from 100 to one
- Watch an engrossing film
- Read something easy
- Listen to some loud music

2 GROUND IT

Introduce regular 'grounding' activities that calm you, such as Pilates or a chat with friends. Dr Chheda-Varma says: 'These can lower raised adrenaline levels and help to alleviate anxiety.'

3 START MOVING

'Exercise can be an exceptionally powerful tool to help manage stress

and anxiety disorders,' says Leanne Spencer, a personal trainer who started Recovery Fitness (recoveryfitness.co.uk) for people suffering from anxiety and other mental health issues, after suffering from anxiety herself. But Dr Chheda-Varma advises against excessive exercise as, 'this can raise adrenaline levels even more.'

4 GO UNDER

Although not approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, there is some anecdotal evidence that hypnotherapy may be beneficial for anxiety, according to Anxiety UK. Juls Abernethy, hypnotherapist and behaviour coach at The Body Retreat (thebodyretreat.co.uk) explains: 'Hypnotherapy combines talking therapy with relaxation, often combining psychotherapy with work that's done in a trance state.

Visit anxietyuk.org.uk, simplyhealth.co.uk

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