

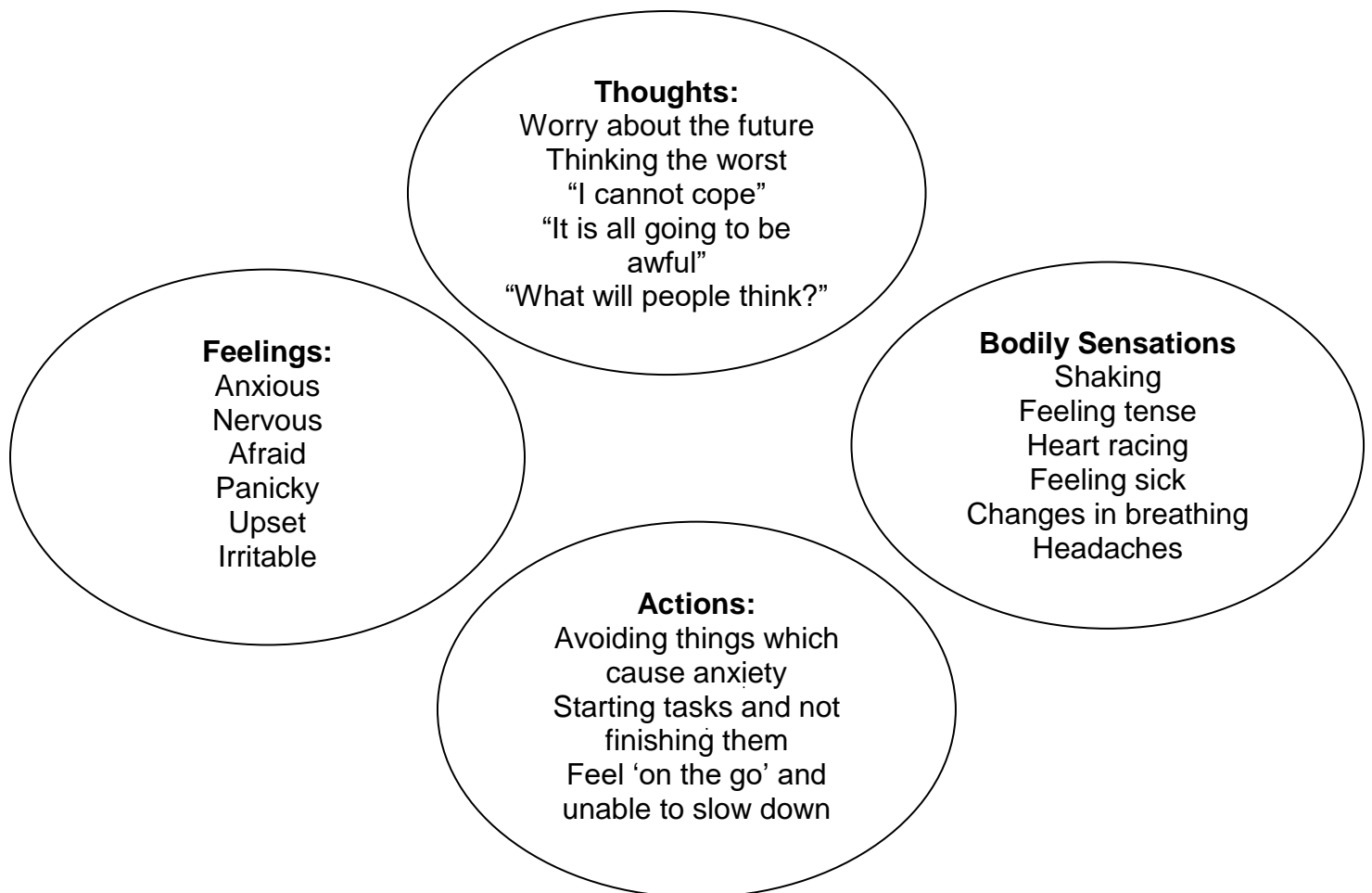
Coping with Anxiety after a Spinal Cord Injury

This leaflet gives a brief overview of anxiety and some tips to help you manage it (on page 4).
If you would like support with managing your anxiety while at the NSIC please ask one of your treating team to refer you to the psychology department.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal reaction to situations which feel threatening. These could be situations that are being experienced right now or ones that are feared in the future. Anxiety is our mind and body's attempt to prepare for, and deal with these situations. At times anxiety can be useful, such as helping to prepare and problem solve something that feels challenging, however it can often become unhelpful and feel overwhelming.

Everyone experiences some degree of anxiety in their life, and it impacts on how we think, how we feel, our bodily sensations and how we act. We do not all experience anxiety in the same way, and for some people these feelings can become dominant, below are examples of some common experiences:



What causes anxiety?

There are several factors which affect anxiety:

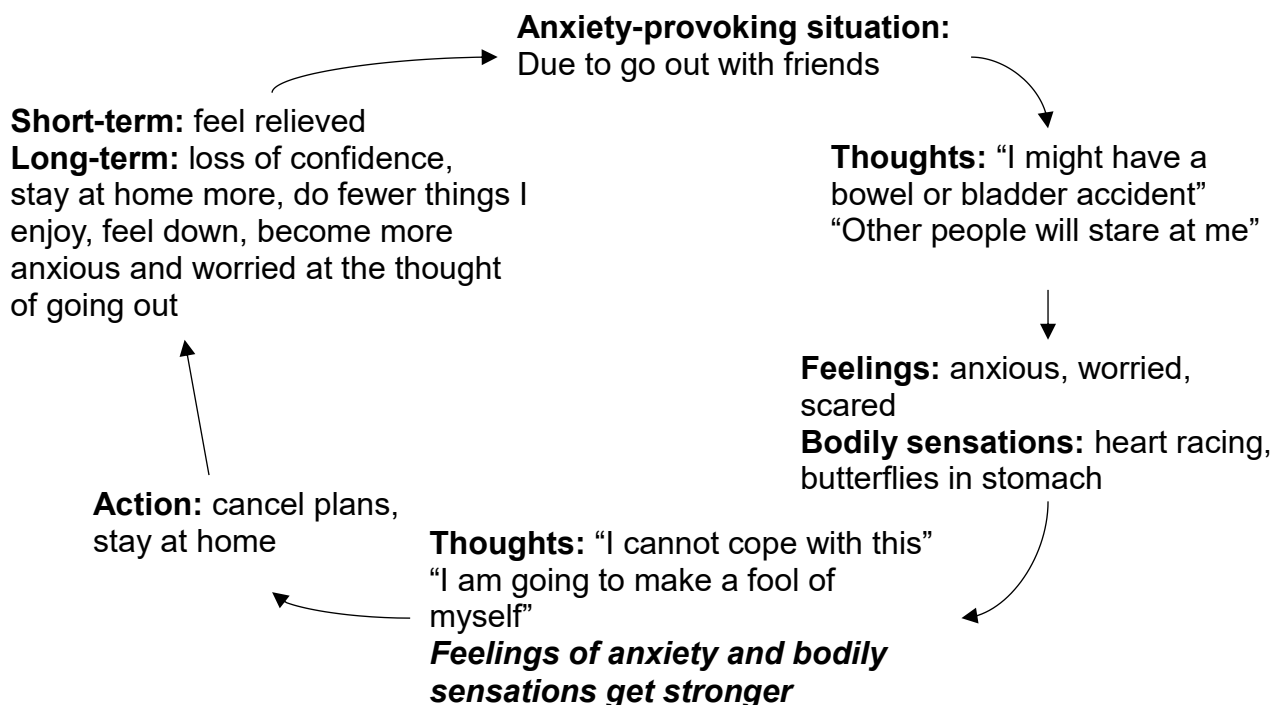
- Difficult, life changing, and stressful events make feelings of anxiety more likely to occur
- Times of uncertainty: when things happen outside our control or which change our plans, our minds and bodies can often respond with anxiety.
- There may be elements of our personality which make us prone to anxiety.
- Past experiences may mean we have learned to respond to certain situations with anxiety.

Whatever your individual experience of anxiety it is likely that there is a combination of things which contribute to how you are feeling.

What keeps anxiety going?

To be able to manage anxiety better, it is important to understand the things which keep it going. Often the way that we think and act can unintentionally add to feelings of anxiety. If we can understand and recognise our anxiety patterns, we can start to learn strategies to help with managing it.

The cycle below is an example of how thoughts and actions can feed into anxiety.

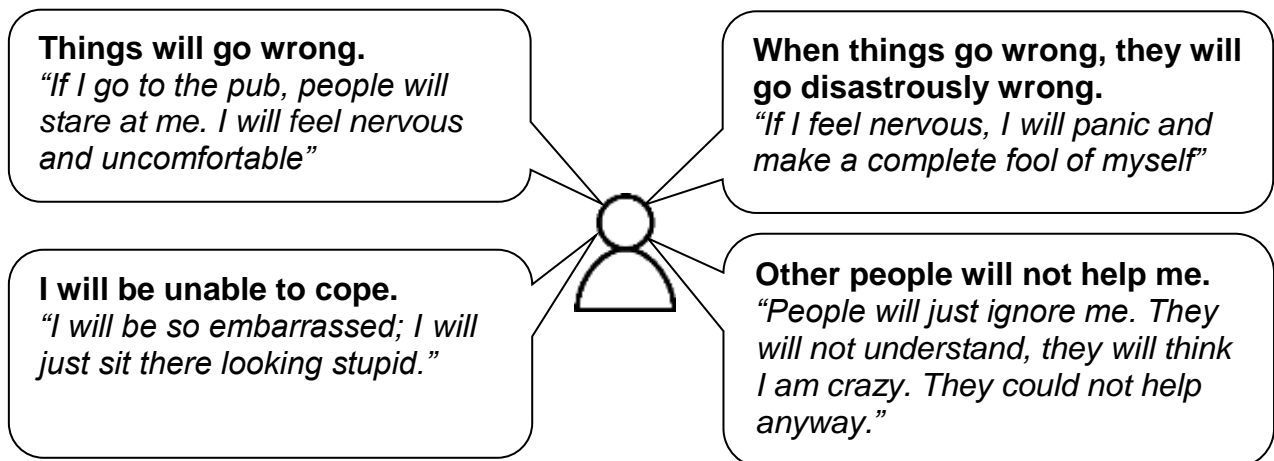


Anxiety can lead to a loss of confidence about trying new activities or doing things that we used to be able to do. If we feel less confident about something, we are less likely to do it. The less we do something, the more anxious and less confident we feel. This can be particularly relevant when anxiety is linked to a change in physical abilities

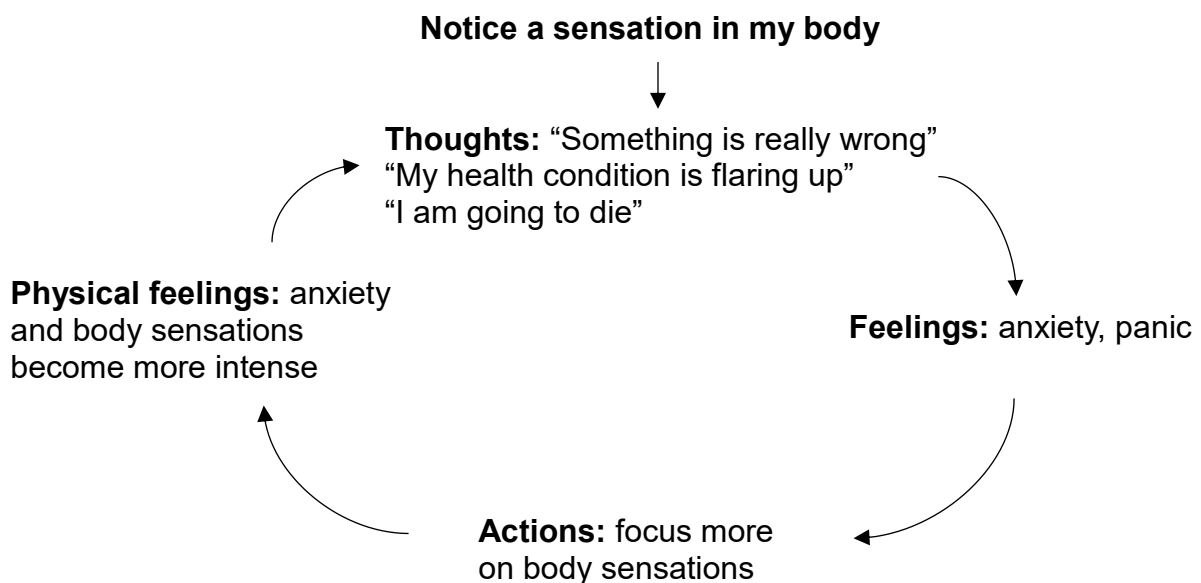
Anxious Thoughts

There are two main types of thoughts which might be noticed when feeling anxious:

- Thoughts about situations** - When we feel anxious, we tend to think about situations in a different way from how we would if we were feeling calm. We can make predictions about situations and how we will manage in them. The thoughts below are some types and examples of thoughts we might notice:



- Thoughts about anxiety** – The physical symptoms of anxiety (e.g. dizziness, nausea, palpitations) can be upsetting or frightening. How we think about these symptoms can lead to increased feelings of anxiety. It can be particularly difficult if feelings of anxiety relate to an illness or disability, as it might be hard to know whether the symptom is a sign of something being wrong, or of anxiety. Below is an example of a cycle that could happen if someone is anxious about physical sensations.



How can anxiety be managed?

Fortunately, there are things that can be learnt and done which can help make anxiety feel more manageable. In reading this leaflet you have taken a step towards better understanding your anxiety.

The Clinical Psychology department can offer a confidential space to discuss and assess your concerns and offer specific techniques which might help with managing them. If you would like to speak to one of the psychology team about your anxiety, please ask one of your treating team to make a referral. We will usually be able to see you within a few weeks of your referral. You can find out more about the psychology team in the “Introducing the Psychology Team working at the NSIC” leaflet. We are also able to talk to you about support for managing anxiety after discharge from NSIC.


There are also techniques you can try yourself which are listed on the next page. These may take some time and practice to become effective, so be patient with yourself. The psychology team can also help you if you are struggling with any of these.

Tips for managing anxiety:

- *Notice when you feel anxious* - It can help to record things that you notice (e.g. writing, using your phone, voice recording). You might find it helpful to notice if you recognise any of the cycles from this leaflet. Some of the key things to try and notice are:
 - What might have triggered your anxiety?
 - What thoughts or images are going through your mind?
 - What emotions and physical sensations are you experiencing?
 - How does it make you act differently? Are there things you are avoiding?
- *Question your thoughts* - you might find it helpful to gently question your thoughts. Some of the questions below might help to identify alternative ways of thinking:
 - Is there another way of looking at this?
 - What evidence do I have for this thought?
 - What would I say to someone else in this situation?
 - What might one of my friends or family members say to me?
- *Dealing with avoidance* – if you notice there are things you want to avoid or are avoiding because of your anxiety it is important to try and approach them. This might be in a different way than before. It could help to break it down into smaller steps and gradually build up what you feel able to do. Having a plan of how you will start doing this can help it to feel less overwhelming.
- *Distractions and relaxation* – finding things that help you to relax or distract you from your worries for a time can help them feel less overwhelming. This will be personal to you but might include listening to music, talking to loved ones, reading or going outside.
- *Be self-compassionate* – remind yourself that it is OK to feel anxious and it doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you, it might be an indicator that you are going through a particularly difficult time. Take some time to do something to look after yourself.

Additional Online Resources

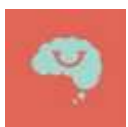
Websites:

 **Anxiety UK:** A national organisation that offers information and support for anxiety. Website: anxietyuk.org.uk, Helpline: 03444 775 774

Apps:



Self-help App for the Mind (SAM): A free wellbeing app to help monitor and manage your mental health. It offers tools and strategies to track and manage thoughts and behaviours. It also has a confidential online community you can connect with.



Smiling Mind: A free app for practicing meditation and mindfulness exercises.



What's Up? A Mental Health App: A free app which uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to help manage depression, anxiety, anger and stress.



Headspace: An app for learning mindfulness and meditation skills. It offers access to hundreds of guided meditations varying in length from as little as a few minutes. It offers a 14 day free trial and a paid for subscription after this.



Calm: An app for managing stress and anxiety, Calm offers a range of guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music. It has some free features but most is accessed through a subscription.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to and after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser as hand sanitisers are not suitable for use when dealing with patients who have symptoms of diarrhoea.

If you need advice or further assistance, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS):

call 01296 316042 or email bht.pals@nhs.net

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.