

FACT SHEET

Anxiety

Anxiety is excessive worry or fear that has a negative impact on a person's ability to function. All of us become anxious from time to time, when something is worrying us or we have to make a difficult decision. It is only an issue if it has a significant impact on our lives.

How can I tell if I have anxiety?

Here are some typical symptoms:

- Increased heart rate, or heart palpitations
- Indigestion, stomach ache, nausea or vomiting
- Tight throat, breathing difficulties, hyperventilation
- Headaches, chest pain, muscle pain
- Fearfulness
- Dizziness, foginess
- Dissociation, sense of things being unreal
- Sensitivity to light and sound

If you experience these symptoms for months on end, you may have generalised anxiety disorder. You may also find you get panic attacks. A counsellor or doctor can diagnose these problems and treat you for them. The following tips and strategies are directed more towards the typical law student who is experiencing anxiety in relation to their studies, for example in the lead up to exams.

Coping strategies

If you are feeling anxious because you haven't prepared adequately, you need to calm yourself down and make a decision to do what you can to get through the subject. This means cancelling any non-study activity that lasts more than half an hour (besides sleep). It means adopting a study schedule where you focus on the most important things and take regular short breaks. You may for example get up at 7 am, study till 8 am, then have a quick shower, then study till 9.15 am, then have breakfast, study till 10.30 am, take a quick walk around the block, then study until 12.30, and have a quick lunch break. Be strategic in your studies - look at past exam papers to get an idea of the kinds of questions you may be asked. Then get a good night's sleep before the exam, and sit down and do your best. If you still fail, you will need to look at why you didn't prepare properly this semester, and develop plans for how you will improve your approach next semester.

If you have in fact prepared appropriately but you still feel panicked, as if you are going to blank out, you need to develop strategies to reduce your anxiety. These include:

- Breathing and relaxation techniques
- Self-talk - for example 'I am well prepared, and I have a brain in my head. I wouldn't have got into this course if I didn't have what it takes to pass the exam'
- Study groups - sometimes just knowing that fellow students are feeling as anxious as you can make you feel better
- Avoid caffeine, as it will only make you more jittery
- Eat well, take some multivitamins, and get some gentle exercise