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**‘Anxiety’**

**Adolescents**

The world at the moment feels like an unsettled and often frightening place. We can often feel anxious, and anxiety can occur more frequently for autistic people and other neurodiverse groups. This is partly due to sensory and social differences. If you would like to learn more about autism, watch our **What is Autism** film:

[What is autism? - Awtistiaeth Cymru | Autism Wales | National Autism Team](https://autismwales.org/en/i-am-autistic/what-is-autism/)

**Please see the following 10 tips which may help you:**

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| 1. **Accepting and acknowledging your anxiety- Do you talk or write about your worries?**   Anxiety is a normal human response that everyone will experience at some point in their lives. It is part of our protective system that keeps us safe and helps us deal with dangerous or difficult situations. When our brain reacts to situations perceived as a threat continuously, this can lead to anxiety. Accepting anxiety rather than fighting it, is the start to recognising when you are feeling anxious. We can then put things in place that will help to reduce and manage your anxiety. You may want to tell someone about your anxiety and how you feel or set time every day to write about what is making you anxious.   1. **Finding an activity that helps- Is there something that helps to calm you?**   The brain is a complex organ, like our muscles, our brain requires some training to take control. Just like physical exercise helping and supporting muscle growth, mindfulness activities will help calm and take back control over our brain. Mindfulness refers to any activity that requires attention and focus on the present, you are tricking your brain to think/ focus on something else rather than your anxiety. As we practice this, we become better at it. Mindfulness activities should be something you enjoy, try using a hobby or special interest as a focus and allow time for it as part of your daily routine; colouring, crochet, playing a musical instrument, yoga, model making, mindful breathing etc. Stimming can also be away to alleviate anxiety. Stimming is a repetitive movement or sound that provides sensory input It can help autistic people manage anxiety, cope in difficult environments, and manage sensory overload. Please click on the links at the bottom of this page for some more ideas.   1. **Daily Structure- Is there a structure to your day?**   Try and establish a clear structure to the day, wake at the same time, get washed dressed have some breakfast. Setting a routine is important, it brings structure to the day. Before you start your school/ college work, write a list of what you need to do. Include breaks- morning, lunch time and afternoon. It can be easy to hyper focus on areas of learning that interest you. Without physically moving to different lessons, we need to make sure we manage our time. An alarm on a clock or watch is a good way of reminding yourself when to take a break, move to another subject etc. Try and stick to the same bedtime each night too, this will help with establishing a good sleep routine which will have an overall effect on your anxiety levels. For more information on sleep please see our Top Ten Tips for Sleep at the bottom of this document.  **4. Rhythm of the Day- Do you move around during the day?**  Moving around and exercising will help relieve anxiety. We know that moving our bodies will use up the excess amounts of adrenaline (stress hormone) in our bodies that can contribute to anxiety. Any type of physical movement will help, a walk in the park, riding a bike, yoga/ chair yoga, an online exercise class or jumping on a trampoline. If you are finding it difficult to leave the house, try and walk up and down the stairs, make bread (kneading dough takes some physical exertion), or dance and move around to your favourite music.  **5. Wise use of technology.**  Our phones, laptops, iPad’s and tablets can be a great source of enjoyment, they can also help us reduce anxiety, stay in touch with family and friends and keep us up to date with what’s going on in the world. We need to be aware that too much screen time can contribute to anxiety. Social media sites like Snap Chat, Instagram and Facebook can get us to depend on likes and other people’s reactions to us. Often, we do not see the reality of people’s lives just what they want us to see and it can seem to be perfect. This can make us feel anxious as we compare ourselves to others. Checking on mainstream news continuously throughout the day will also have a negative impact and make us feel anxious about the current situation. Try and limit watching the news to once a day. If using social media try and follow positive news accounts like Good News Movement, Global Positive News, Positive News UK.  **6. What we can control and what we can’t.**  There are certain things in our lives that we have control over, for example what film to watch on TV, what books we read, the food we eat, what we drink. There are some things we have no control over……Write down the things that you can control and the things that you can’t. Focus on the things that you can control.  **7. Food and Drink- What do you eat and drink?**  Coffee and other products containing caffeine (tea, energy drinks, fizzy drinks-coke, and some painkillers), can trigger anxiety and make feelings of anxiety worse. This is because caffeine stimulates the central nervous system and temporarily increases blood pressure and heart rate. We all react differently to caffeine, whilst some people can drink 5 cups of coffee a day with no effect, for others just a cup a day may raise levels of anxiety. Try swapping caffeinated drinks for decaffeinated.  If you do rely on caffeine, gradually reduce the amount you have over two weeks. Try keeping a diary, making a note of your caffeine consumption and your anxiety symptoms.  **8. Environment detective- Adapt your environment.**  The environment can be a source of anxiety, because of the different sensory triggers around us. Certain smells, lights and sounds will affect us and make us feel anxious, sometimes without knowing. Think about your environment and if you can change it. Minimise sensory overload, wear noise cancelling headphones if you can hear noise from the room next door, sunglasses in a bright room or Irlen lenses if you are photosensitive.  *“if you look at a happy autistic person and an unhappy autistic person, the reason can often be found in the environment” Rhi Lloyd Williams* ***What is Autism (LINK)****.*  **9. Energy Accounting- How many spoons have you used today?**  We often feel exhausted at the thought of certain activities, for example taking a shower, interacting with friends, or completing schoolwork/ assignments. Try and think about your energy levels. If you need to take a shower in the morning give yourself some extra time. If you have to take part in online lessons, take regular breaks throughout the day. Make sure you give yourself time to recover and recharge at the end of the day too. Learn to say no! It’s Ok to need time to recover from day to day life autistic people are living in a non-autistic world, and often feel misunderstood, which is exhausting.  **10. A Daily Treat- Plan one nice thing for yourself every day.**  Now more than ever, we need to be kind to ourselves building in a daily treat, for example a relaxing bath, reading a book or having a bar of chocolate, whatever makes you happy We all need something to look forward to. |

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| **Resources & website links**  There are lots of resources and videos already available to help reduce anxiety levels, please see below:  **Books**  <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Wellbeing-Journal-Creative-Activities-Inspire/dp/1782438009>  <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Living-Well-Spectrum-Challenges-High-Functioning-ebook/dp/B00GAPFJNW>  **Visual Schedules**  [Visual supports (autism.org.uk)](https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/visual-supports)  **Yoga**  [Tîm Awtistiaeth Cenedlaethol / National Autism Team - Posts | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/AutismWales/posts/281679786537481)  **Calming Mindfulness Mediation Meditation before Sleeping**  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFEnruF-dts&feature=youtu.be>  **Useful websites**  [About Anxiety - Anxiety UK](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/about-anxiety-and-anxiety-disorders/)  [YoungMinds - children and young people's mental health charity](https://youngminds.org.uk/)  [The Mental Elf (nationalelfservice.net)](https://www.nationalelfservice.net/mental-health/)  [Mental Health | The Mighty](https://themighty.com/topic/mental-health/)  [Lies Anxiety Tells You and How to Combat Them | The Mighty](https://themighty.com/2016/07/lies-anxiety-tells-you-and-how-to-combat-them/)  [Anxiety Slayer™](https://www.anxietyslayer.com/)  If you require additional support, you may need to contact your school nurse, or GP.  **Sleep**  For more information on sleep, please click on the document below: |

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