

## **SOCIAL ANXIETY**

Social Anxiety is one of the most common forms of anxiety and affects both men and women of all ages. Most of us feel shy or anxious in social situations at some point; however this may get more serious for some individuals. Some may find that their relationships, friendships, career and life general can be greatly restricted or affected by this problem. In brief, people experiencing social anxiety may fear what others think of them (usually that others will see them in a negative light), may believe that others are better than them or that they are being watched closely in social situations. This, in turn, affects the body, thoughts and behaviours. We will go through the effects that social anxiety has on the body and mind in this leaflet.

### **What causes social anxiety?**

- Almost all of us experience mild anxiousness, nervousness at some point in our life.

For example, when attending a meeting when you might not know everyone present.

- Social anxiety can often be related to low self-esteem or a poor opinion of the self.
- It 'typically' starts in childhood or the adolescent years and can progress onto adulthood.
- Some people are naturally more anxious than others in social situations and have learned to worry in social situations.
- However, sometimes social anxiety can be a result of being bullied, a critical parent etc.
- This can result in a person avoiding social situations completely.

### **Social anxiety in the body:**

Below are some ways that you can identify how social anxiety manifests in the body when placed in a social situation.

- Heart racing/pounding
- Chest feeling tight/painful
- Tingling/numbness in toes/fingers
- Having to go to the toilet
- Dry mouth
- Breathing changes
- Blushing
- Restlessness
- Sweating

## Social Anxiety in the mind:

Below are some ways that you can identify how social anxiety manifests in the mind when placed in a social situation. These are some examples of thoughts or ways we may feel that may come to mind when experiencing social anxiety.

- You may think you are acting in a way that is embarrassing to others
- You may feel fearful of social situations, and also know that your fear is unreasonable.
- Thinking you are making a 'fool of myself', 'I am boring', 'I am strange', 'if I get it wrong people will not like me' etc.
- Creating a negative self-image and thinking that this is how everyone else will see you e.g. my friends see me as 'boring', 'weak', 'timid', 'uninteresting', 'foolish' etc.
- Before you go into a social situation you are fearful, and think that it will go badly.
- After you come from a social situation you think 'That was awful. I will never do that again' As a result, you often end up avoiding social situations completely, creating excuses as to why you 'can't' attend. You may even avoid telephone calls, or visitors.

Sometimes, people with social anxiety can and do attend social situations, but they need something to 'help them through it'. Quite often people use alcohol, drugs and smoking to 'mask' how they are really feeling in social situations.

People also offer to help at all social situations so they can keep busy, rehearse what they will say, sit in a corner, plan your exit (by staging calls from family members) in order to leave as soon as possible.

These are avoidance behaviours, and will only help the social anxiety for a very short period of time. There are many other ways to help your social anxiety long-term.

## Ways to overcome social anxiety long-term?

It may be helpful to try and identify when, how and where you experience social anxiety. Keep a diary about your feelings and what makes you feel anxious about social situations.

If you know what happens to make you injure yourself, you can try to work out how to change things.

- [Understanding Social Anxiety](#)- how it manifests in the body and mind
- [Reducing negative thoughts/beliefs by challenging your usual thoughts](#)/behaviours
- [Deep and mindful breathing and relaxation](#)- this works with tackling the physical symptoms of social anxiety
- Creating a 'small steps' plan, and take little steps to tackling the behaviours you usually use to 'hide' your social anxiety. For example, if you usually eat lunch in your office/room, try going to the canteen.

- Reminding yourself that this is a long-term plan, and don't feel bad when symptoms don't go away overnight.
- Reducing how much you focus on yourself.
- Seek further help if having problem/looking for advice on any of the above.