

# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

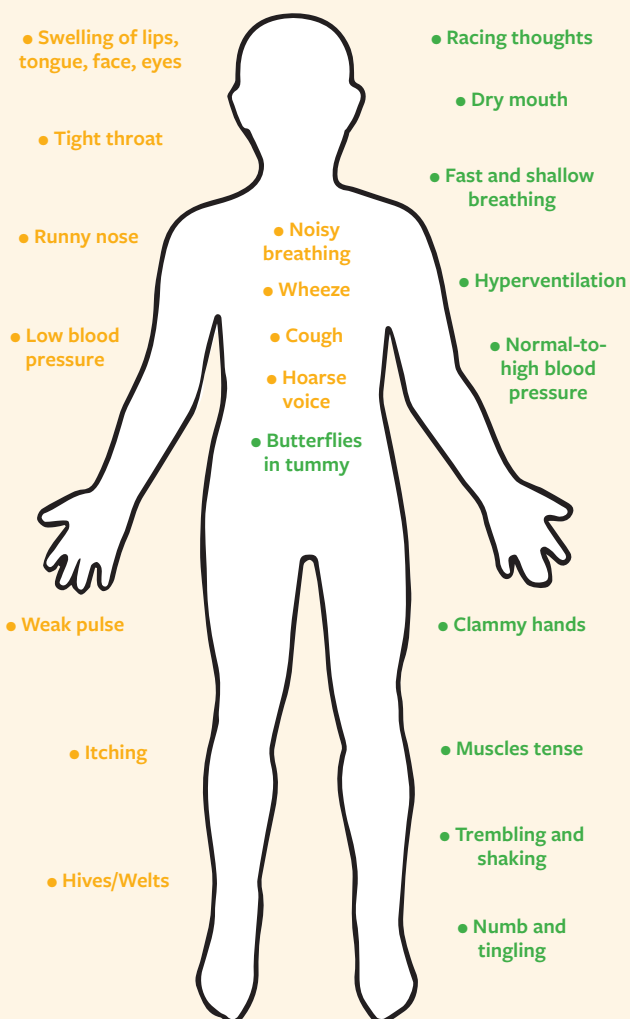
Anxiety is a normal response to the challenges we face on a day-to-day basis. Anxiety is our body's smoke alarm system to keep us safe from danger.

When your child is living with a potentially life-threatening condition like allergies, both you and your child can have a more sensitive smoke alarm system. Like a smoke alarm it can be helpful. For example, when you are a parent of a child with a food allergy some level of anxiety can help keep you aware of potential risks.

Unfortunately, smoke alarms sometimes also go off when you have burnt toast. So it's important to recognise a false alarm when it comes to anxiety!

So how do we recognise when our smoke alarm has gone off? The tricky thing about allergy and anxiety is that they can feel very similar.

## Here are some signs of ALLERGY VS. ANXIETY



## Anxiety can range from helpful to unhelpful levels



### Helpful:

Able to do what you want/need to do without much difficulty.

### Unhelpful:

Uncomfortable thoughts and feelings that start getting in the way.

### Severe:

Panic, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or Changes to sleep or eating patterns.

## Signs of when anxiety is getting unhelpful:

### Thoughts

- Worried thoughts that are hard to shake off
- Unpleasant/distressing thoughts or images
- Stressful memories

### Feelings

- Loss of confidence/feeling low
- Stress
- Panic

### Behaviour

- Not going out
- Restricting food (even safe foods)
- Spending lots of time checking
- Not doing the things you want to do or need to do

## Spot the unhelpful anxiety!

1. Reminding your child to take their adrenaline (epinephrine) injector (such as EpiPen<sup>®</sup> or Anapen<sup>®</sup>) before they go out
2. Insisting on going with your child when they're out with friends to a restaurant
3. Flagging that your child has an allergy before a sleepover with the other child's parents
4. Your child forgets their adrenaline injector and you find it hard to calmly discuss how to prevent this from happening in the future

Answers: 1-3 (Helpful) 2-4 (Unhelpful)

## Anxiety can be contagious!

As a parent, it's almost our job to worry about our child, and there is cause for even more worry when they have a chronic condition like an allergy.

Just like in the safety briefing on a plane, it's important to put the oxygen mask on yourself before assisting your child. So it's important to look after yourself! By recognizing and addressing your own anxiety, you will not only be better and more able to care for your child, but you will also prevent anxiety from spreading.

*Flip the page over to learn how to address anxiety...*

## HOW DO I LOOK AFTER MYSELF WHEN I JUST DON'T HAVE THE TIME?

Just like how anxiety can be contagious, calmness can be contagious too! So the better you are at keeping calm, the better your child will be at managing stress.

The best way to practise calm is to practise **self-care**.

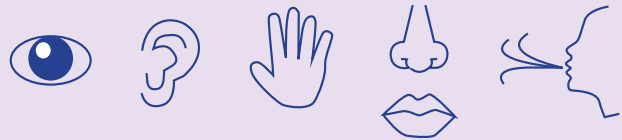
“But I don’t have the time for self-care! How do I fit this in my day?”- well, the key is finding **micro moments** to practise self-care. Here are some examples to get you started:

- When you’ve stopped at the traffic lights, tense your muscles for 3 seconds and then relax your muscles 3 seconds
- Park your car a little further away to get an extra 5 minutes of exercise
- Do relaxation (e.g. deep breathing) with your child
- Set aside 10 minutes at the end of the day (when everyone else has gone to bed) to do something for you – that could be listening to your favourite songs, debriefing with someone, writing down your worries, enjoying a herbal tea, drawing

Another great way to press pause on anxiety is to focus our attention away from anxiety. We can use our senses to help us do this!

Try the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise:

**Notice 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you taste/smell, 1 deep breath.**



This is a skill that takes practise, so try to find a moment each day to practise! You can do this exercise with any everyday activity. For example, the next time you have a shower – notice what you see, listen out to the sound of the water or play your favourite song in the background, notice the temperature of the water, feel the sensation of the soap/shampoo, notice the smell of the soap/shampoo, and take one deep breath before you jump out of the shower.

## WHERE TO GET HELP

A psychologist can help you and your child explore and address anxiety. You can see a psychologist in the community by getting a referral from a GP. A great way to find a psychologist is through:

1. [www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist](http://www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist)
2. Or giving your local Headspace a call/message: [headspace.org.au/headspace-centres](http://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres)

You could also consider reaching out to your child’s school counsellor for extra help.

**There are some helpful organisations that can provide information and support:**

### ▶ ALLERGY & ANAPHYLAXIS AUSTRALIA

- a national support organisation for people managing allergies including the risk of anaphylaxis

1300 728 000

[www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

### ▶ 250K

- an information hub for the 250 000 Australian teens and young adults with severe allergies

[www.250k.org.au](http://www.250k.org.au)

**These are some great books:**

- **Helping Your Anxious Child:** A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents by R. Rapee, A. Wignall, S. H. Spence, V. Cobham and H. Lyneham.
- **Brainstorm:** The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain by D. J. Siegel.
- **Managing Your Child’s Food Allergy:** The Complete Australian Guide for Parents by A. Orman.