

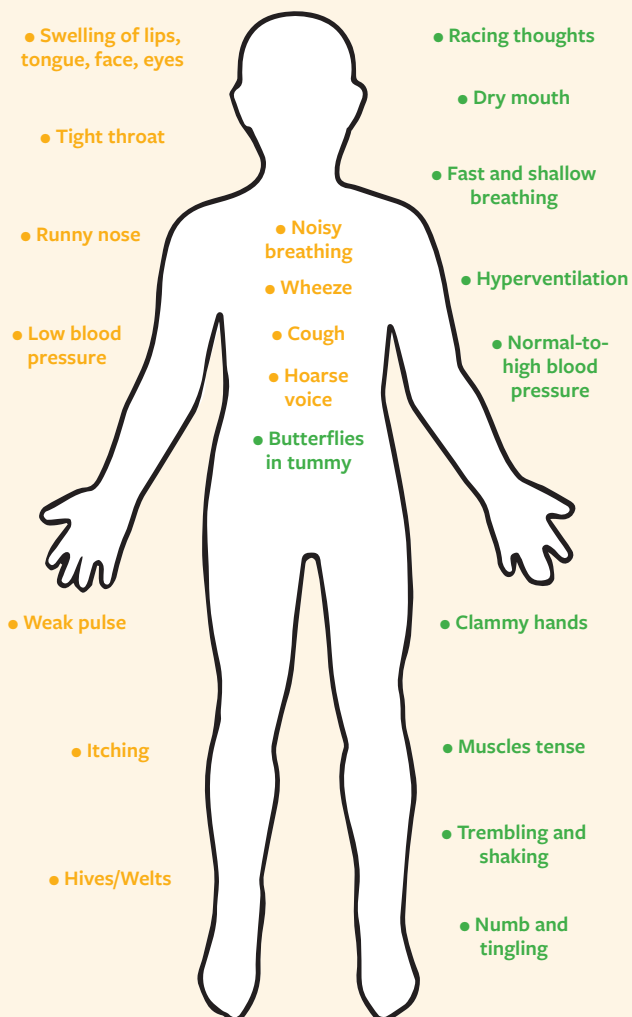
WHAT IS ANXIETY?

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 you have a food allergy or live with the risk of anaphylaxis, your alarm system can be more sensitive because you're living with a potentially life-threatening condition. Like a smoke alarm it can be helpful. For example, when you have a food allergy some level of anxiety can help motivate you to check food labels and remember to bring your adrenaline (epinephrine) injector (such as EpiPen® or Anapen®) with you!

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 allergic reactions 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:	Unhelpful:	Severe:
Able to do what you want/need to do without much difficulty.	Uncomfortable thoughts and feelings that start getting in the way.	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. Remembering to take your adrenaline injector before you go out
2. Discussing your allergy with a restaurant at the time of booking to ensure they can cater to your needs
3. Declining invitations to visit friends and family for fear of being exposed to your allergen
4. Your work colleagues organise the work end of year break up at a seafood restaurant without considering your fish allergy and you find it hard to calmly discuss how to prevent this from happening in the future

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

Anxiety can be contagious!

When someone has a chronic condition like an allergy it is hard not to feel anxious, and this can affect relationships.

Just like in the safety briefing on a plane, it's important to put the oxygen mask on yourself before assisting your child or other family members. So, it's important to look after yourself! By recognising and addressing your own anxiety, you will not only be better and more able to care for those around you and maintain healthy relationships, 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 those around you will be at managing stress.

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

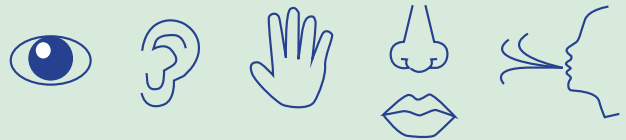
“But I don’t have the time for self-care! How do I fit this in my day?”- well, the key is finding **micro moments** to practise self-care. Here are some examples to get you started:

- 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 such as deep breathing, focusing on your breath in, then holding it for a few seconds and slowly breathing out. You can focus on a particular part of your body and try to ease the tension with each breath out.
- Set aside 10 minutes at the end of the day (maybe when everyone else has gone to bed) to do something for you – that could be listening to your favourite songs, writing down your worries, enjoying a cup of tea, drawing, or reading. You could even debrief with a family member or a friend if that helps.

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 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
2. Or giving your local Headspace a call/message: headspace.org.au/headspace-centres
3. Some workplaces have a counsellor who you could consider reaching out to for help.
4. Beyond Blue **1300 22 4636**
5. Lifeline **131 114**

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

▶ **250K**

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

www.250k.org.au