

Anxiety in a nutshell



A Practical Guide to Anxiety
2019

Introduction

Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their lives, whether moving from primary to high school, sitting an exam or asking someone out for the first time. It is normal to experience anxiety in everyday situations, however persistent and excessive anxiety can cause more serious mental health problems.



Anxiety is one of the most common mental health problems in nearly every country in the world. While a low level of anxiety can be useful, in some cases it can take over your life.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a type of fear usually associated with a perceived threat or something going wrong in the future, but it can also arise from something happening right now. Unlike fear itself, which is a response to an immediate danger, anxiety is an ongoing sense of worry without a specific cause.

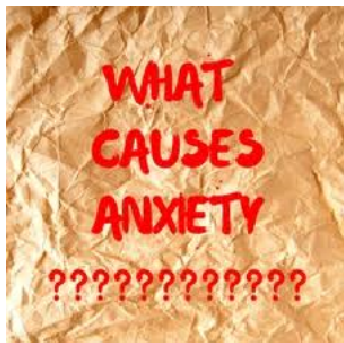
Most people get through passing moments of anxiety with no lasting effect. However chronic anxiety can affect our ability to focus, make decisions, relationships with friends and family or even stop people from leaving their house. Around 1 in 6 people in the UK can have a mental health problem like anxiety each year.

What makes 'you' anxious?

Feelings of anxiety can be caused by lots of things and vary according to what you're worried about and how you act when you feel apprehensive. They depend on factors like your genes, how you were brought up, what's happened to you in your life and the way you learn and cope with things. Just knowing what makes you anxious and why can be the first steps to managing anxiety.

10 Things Teens Fear Most in 2019

- peer pressure/not fitting in
- sex
- failure
- climate change
- money (poverty)
- the future/growing up
- lost identity
- safety
- embarrassment



(Source: www.parentology.com)

What makes me feel anxious is?

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What are the signs of anxiety & how do you spot them?

Life is full of potentially stressful events and it is normal to feel anxious about everyday things. There can be a single trigger or event that raises anxiety levels, but generally it may be a number of things that increase anxiety levels, including exams, work deadlines, how we think we look, going on a first date or whether we feel safe.

Anxiety has a strong effect on us because it is one of our natural survival responses. It causes our minds and bodies to speed up to prepare us to respond to an emergency.



Signs & Symptoms of Anxiety

Thinking

- mind racing or going blank, decreased concentration and memory, indecisiveness, confusion, vivid dreams.

Feeling

- unrealistic or excessive fear and worry (about past or future events), irritability, impatience, anger, nervous or on edge.

Behaviour

- avoidance of situations, obsessive or compulsive behaviour,
- distress in social situations, sleep disturbance, increased use of alcohol or other drugs.

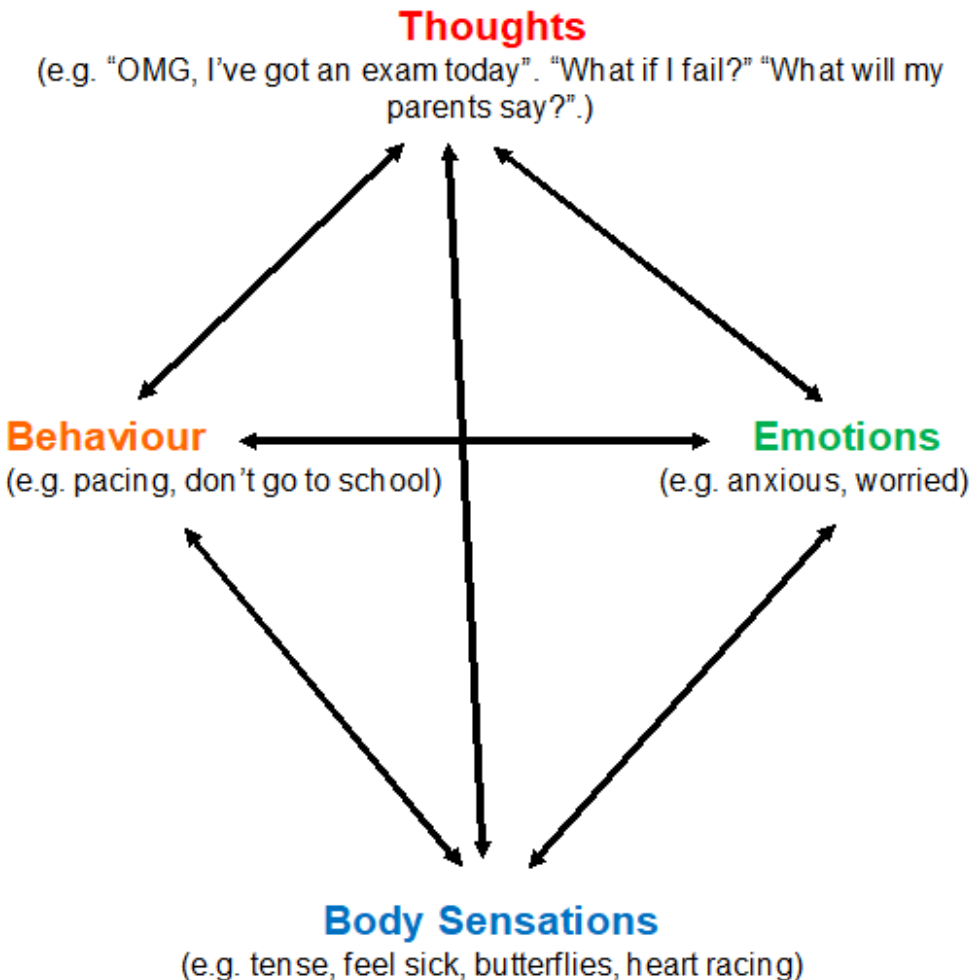
Physical

- rapid or irregular heartbeat, fast breathing, weakened or tense
- muscles, sweating, churning stomach/loose bowels, dizziness & dry mouth

How Anxiety “Works”?

There are 4 parts of anxiety:

- **Thoughts-** what we say to ourselves
- **Emotions-** how we feel
- **Physical Sensations-** how are body responds
- **Behaviour-** what we do or our actions



“A person cannot just simply decide not to be anxious anymore” (Anxiety Care UK)

Anxious



Calm

In order to feel more calm and settled, we first need to accept the fact that we are feeling anxious.



Fear and anxiety can affect all of us every now and then. Most people get through passing moments of anxiety with no lasting effect. People experiencing anxiety in their everyday lives often find the personal resources to cope through simple remedies.

How to cope when we are feeling anxious

1. Talking it though

It can be hard to talk about our feelings. But it can be helpful to talk to friends, family or someone who has had the same feelings as us.

2. Facing the things that make us anxious

Often our fear of something is worse than what it is really like. When we face our fears and find out they aren't so scary, it can help us feel less anxious in future.

3. Know yourself

Write about what makes us anxious. This will help us to understand how we feel.

4. Relax

Things like yoga, meditation or massage relax your breathing and help us feel more calm so we can deal with anxious feelings.

5. Exercise

Exercise can make us feel better. It can make us feel happier and is a good way of stopping us feeling anxious in the first place.

6. Healthy eating

Eating lots of fruit and vegetables and avoiding too much sugar can help. Things like coffee and sugar can make us feel like we have lots of energy. But when this runs out we feel very low.

7. Avoid alcohol or drink healthy amounts

Some people drink alcohol when they feel nervous to forget their feelings. But this only lasts for a while. When it wears off we can feel worse, and be less ready to deal with these feelings when they come back.

8. Faith/Spirituality

Religious or spiritual beliefs can help us feel connected to something bigger than ourselves. This can help us feel calm and relaxed.

How to get help?

We can ask for help if we feel anxious all the time, or if it feels like our anxiety is taking over our life. It may be hard to talk about our feelings but asking for help is a good thing.

The first thing to do is talk to your doctor if your anxiety persists and starts to affect your daily life. They will be able to tell you about the things that can help you.

There are many different things you could do to help with anxious feelings:

- 1. *Talking about how you feel with a counsellor.***
- 2. *Being more aware of your thoughts (mindfulness).*** Mindfulness looks at changing how we think about things and ourselves. It looks at what is happening now and not worrying about the past or the future. You can do a course to learn how to be Mindful.
- 3. *Meditation.*** Meditation can help people think more carefully about their thoughts and to feel calmer.
- 4. *Taking medicine.*** Taking medicines can help us to cope with anxious feelings for a short time. It cannot stop anxious feelings by itself. Medicines are most useful when used with other things like counselling.
- 5. *Joining a support group.*** Local support or self-help groups bring together people with the same feelings as you to share stories, tips, and try out new ways of feeling better. Your doctor, library or local Citizens Advice Bureau will have details of support groups near you.

The Different Muscle Groups

Remember to start the progressive muscle relaxation from your feet and work

Downwards, or vice versa if you want to:

Forehead (raise your eyebrows as far as you can)

Eyes (clench your eyelids tightly shut)

Mouth (open your mouth wide enough to stretch the hinges of your jaw)

Neck and shoulders (raise your shoulders up to touch your ears)

Chest (tighten by taking a deep breath)

Stomach (suck your stomach in)

Buttocks (tighten by pulling your buttocks together)

Entire right arm (tighten your biceps by drawing your forearm up towards your shoulder and "make a muscle", while clenching fist)

Hand (clench your fist)

Repeat on the other side of your body

Entire leg (squeeze thigh muscles while doing above)

Lower leg and foot (tighten your calf muscle by pulling toes towards you)

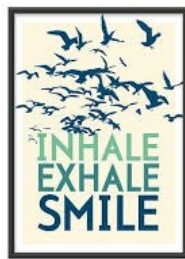
Foot (curl your toes downward)

Repeat on the other side of your body



Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script

*Take a deep breath in through your nose...hold your breath for a few seconds...and now breathe out...take another deep breath through your nose... Now pay attention to your body and how it feels.... Start with your **right foot**... squeeze all the muscles in your right foot. Curl your toes as tight as you can, now hold it....hold it...good...now relax and exhale...let your foot go limp...notice the difference between the tension and relaxation....feel the tension flow out of your foot like water...(then repeat with **right lower leg and foot, entire right leg**, etc...)*



Release only

A good way to even further shorten the time you take to relax your muscles is to become familiar with the “release only” technique. One of the benefits of tensing and releasing muscles is that you learn to recognise what tense muscles feel like and what relaxed muscles feel like.

Once you feel comfortable with the tension and relaxation techniques, you can start doing “release only”, which involves **removing** the “tension” part of the exercise.

For example, instead of tensing your stomach and chest before relaxing them, try just relaxing the muscles. At first, the feeling of relaxation might feel less intense than when you tensed the muscles beforehand, but with practice, the release-only technique can be just as relaxing.

A Final Note: Remember to practise progressive muscle relaxation often, whether you are feeling anxious or not. This will make the exercise even more effective when you really do need to relax! Though it may feel a bit tedious at first, ultimately you will gain a skill that will probably become a very important part of managing your anxiety in your daily life.

Mindfulness Techniques

1. Basic mindfulness meditation/breathing

Sitting quietly and focusing on your natural breathing without trying to change it. Allowing thoughts to come and go, without getting caught up in them, then gently bringing your awareness back to your breath.

2. Body scanning/body sensations

Noticing subtle body sensations, how each part of your body feels.

Experiencing sensations such as itching, heat, coolness, aches etc. without trying to change them.

3. Sensory awareness

Notice and appreciate your environment. Notice sights, sounds, tastes, smells and really focus on them.

4. Emotional awareness

Allow emotions, such as anger or anxiety to present. Be aware of how the emotion feels in the body. Name the emotion, then let it go.



Learning to stay in the present

A less formal approach to mindfulness can also help you to stay in the present and fully participate in your life. You can choose any task or moment to practice informal mindfulness, whether you are eating, showering, walking, revising. Attending to these points will help:

- Start by bringing your attention to the sensations in your body
- Breathe in through your nose, allowing the air downward into your lower belly. Let your abdomen expand fully.
- Now breathe out through your nose.
- Notice the sensations of each inhalation and exhalation
- Proceed with the task at hand slowly and with full deliberation
- Engage your senses fully. Notice each sight, touch, and sound so that you savour every sensation.
- When you notice that your mind has wandered from the task at hand, gently bring your attention back to the sensations of the moment.

Activity 1. Mindful Breathing



The intention of this brief exercise is to focus your attention on your breath as you allow thoughts and sensations to come and allow them to go.

Find a comfortable place to sit. Put your feet on the ground and straighten your posture. Gently close your eyes. Let your shoulders drop down from your ears.

Bring your attention to your belly, feeling it rise and expand gently on the in-breath and fall on the out-breath.

Keep the focus on your breathing, being with each in breath and each outbreath for its full duration as if you were riding waves of your breathing

Breathe in through your nose, noticing how your belly expands and sensing the air at the tip of your nose and inside your nostrils. As you exhale notice your belly deflate like a balloon, and sense the warmer air rush out of your nostrils.

Now continue to focus on your breath, quietly saying to your self 'in' and 'out' in time with your breath

Every time you notice your mind wandering off the breath, notice what it was that took you away and then gently bring your attention back to you breath and your belly, feeling the breath coming in and going out.

If your mind wanders a thousand times, then your job is to simply bring it back to the breath every time no matter what it becomes preoccupied with.

You may become aware of physical sensations in the body or feelings. Simply notice them, and bring your attention back to the breath.

It is normal for your mind to wander, just keep gently bringing it back.

Breathing it... breathing out..... In.....out.....in.....out.....

When you are ready, start to bring your awareness to any sounds in the room.

Practice this for 10 minutes a day (longer if you can), everyday. Find a quiet and convenient time when you know you wont be disturbed.

Be aware of how it feels to spend some time each day just being with your breath without having to 'do' anything. Just enjoy the time for you.

Activity 2. Quick check in breath

Tune into your breathing at different times during the day when you remember or when you feel like you need it.

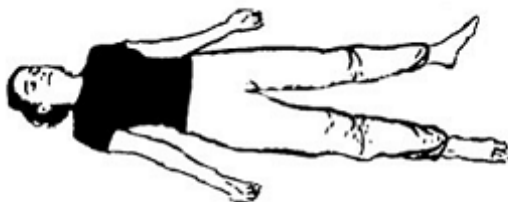
Place your hand on your belly so you can feel the rise and fall as you breathe.

As you breathe in, say “breathing in”, as

So this for a couple of times for breath. This technique can help you keep your mind on breath. As you practice, your breath will become peaceful and your mind will not be worrying or overthinking.



Activity 3. The mindful body scan



(You can find lots of audio scripts online to listen to as you are doing it)

This should take about 15 – 20 minutes. You may want to lie on the floor on a mat making sure you are warm and comfortable, covering yourself with a blanket and resting your head on a cushion or pillow. You can also do this sitting upright. Taking care to ensure you will not be disturbed for the period of the body scan. The idea is to fall **awake** through being fully aware of your body, not to fall asleep!

1. Firstly checking in with your body just as it is right now noticing the sensations that are present, feeling the contact the body is making with the floor.
2. Then starting to scan the body, sweeping your awareness through different parts of the body, without judging what you are aware of but bringing attention to your experience moment to moment.

- 3.** Starting with the crown of the head, noticing any sensations here, tingling, numbness, tightness or relaxation. Feel the weight of the head as it rests on the cushion, then include awareness the forehead, noticing whether or not you can feel the pulse in the forehead, whether there is tightness or ease. Then including the eyes, the nose, cheeks, mouth and chin and finally the ears including any sounds that you notice coming to the ears. Being aware moment by moment the changing pattern of sensations, feelings of warmth, coolness. If you notice your mind wandering then noticed your mind has wandered is a moment of awareness, then just gently guide it back to the part of the body you are focusing on.
- 4.** Then letting go of the head and face, moving your awareness into the neck and shoulders, noticing the strong muscles in this part of the body, having awareness of any tension in the neck and throat, perhaps becoming aware of the sensation of air in the throat.
- 5.** Moving your awareness now to the shoulders, the places where there is contact between the shoulders and the floor, stretching your awareness into the arms, elbows, wrists, hands and fingers, aware of what is here in each moment.
- 6.** Shifting the focus now to the chest area, noticing the subtle rise and fall of the chest with the in and out breath, turning your awareness to the ribcage, front and back of the ribs, sides of the ribs, the upper back resting on the floor. Noticing any aches and pains here and seeing if you can bring a sense of gentleness and kindness to these areas.
- 7.** Turning your awareness now to the abdomen and stomach, the place where we feel our “gut feelings” noticing your attitude to this part of your body, seeing if you can allow it to be as it is, taking a relaxed and accepting approach to this part of the body. Then stretching your awareness to the lower back, the lumber spine, feeling the gentle pressure as the back meets the floor before moving your awareness to the pelvic area, the hip bones, and sitting bones, groin, noticing any sensations or lack of sensations that are here, perhaps being aware of the breath in this part of the body. Bringing a kind attention here.
- 8.** Now letting go of the torso as the centre of your awareness and move your attention into the thighs of both legs, feeling the weight of the legs, gently noticing what other sensations there are here, tuning into the skin, bone and muscle of the legs here. If your mind has wandered into thinking, planning,

worrying, day dreaming then just gently guiding it back to this part of the body.

9. Next turning your attention gently towards the knees, bringing a friendly attention, notice if there is any discomfort here, and if there is none then noticing what is present already here.

10. Stretching your attention into the calves of both legs, noticing how your muscles feel here, feeling this part of the legs from the inside out, the flesh and bone of the lower legs. And again checking in where your attention is from time to time and noticing the quality of your attention seeing if it is possible to bring a gentleness and kindness into your awareness, not forcing your self, bringing a lightness of touch to your attention in this part of the body.

11. Finally moving your attention into both feet, the heels of the feet, the instep the balls of the feet , the tops of the feet, skin and bone and finally the toes, seeing if its possible to distinguish one toe from another. Noticing whether there is tension here, sensations, numbness, tingling and allowing any tension to softening as you bring a gentle attention to it.

12. Now taking one or two deeper breaths and widen your focus, filling the whole body with awareness, noticing whatever is present, sweeping the body with your awareness from top to bottom, experiencing the body from the inside out. Noticing whether there is any non acceptance towards any parts of the body as you fill the body with a gentle awareness and seeing if you can have compassion for any judgments or for any tensions or pain that might be present as and when you notice it. Feeling the energy of life flowing through you and resting in awareness of this amazing body that you have, compassion for its pains and appreciation for its capacities and the wonder of it.

As you end the meditation, rest in quietness and clarity. After you get up, pay gentle attention to sensations as you move and go about your day, maintaining your focus and attention.





Activity 4. Mindful observation

This exercise is simple but incredibly powerful. It is designed to take your mind away from your thoughts and connect you with the beauty of the natural environment, something that is easily missed when we are rushing around.

Choose a natural object from within your immediate environment and focus on it intently for at least two minutes. This could be a flower or an insect, or even the clouds or the moon.

Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at. Simply relax for as long as your concentration allows. Look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time. Visually explore every aspect of its formation. Allow yourself to be consumed by its presence.

Another powerful mindful observation is to sit in a natural environment and focus for a while on the sound of the birds, or the heat of the sun on your skin, or the feel of the grass on your feet. Take as long as you want to fully immerse yourself. Enjoy the feelings and sensations of being fully present in something beautiful.

Activity 5: Tuning In

This is a good exercise to relax and focus at the beginning of a revision or homework session.

Make yourself comfortable sitting on a chair or the floor. Close your eyes and imagine your sense of hearing as a radio that can tune into different stations.

First, listen to the sounds farthest away for a moment. What can you hear in the distance? Really listen....

Then, change the station and listen to the sounds in the room. What can you hear around you? Really listen...

Change the station again and listen to the internal sounds of your body – your breathing, your heartbeat, your tummy digesting etc. Bring your attention to each part of your body, starting with the tips of their toes and up through their legs, hips, back, arms, shoulders, neck and head.

Change the station again and listen just to your breathing. Really tune into the little sounds included in the bigger sound of your breath.

Now extend your attention to the sounds of the room again.

Finally listen to the sounds furthest away...far far in the distance.

Now, when you are ready, gently open your eyes.

How you feel now in comparison to you started the activity? Was it easy to concentrate? What was the easiest part of the exercise? What was the most difficult? Why might it be important to hone in on a certain aspect of your surroundings? What is the benefit of checking in with your body?





of mindfulness

This is an exercise that you can do almost anywhere, anytime because it is very brief and quite simple. It can be used in the midst of a high-risk or stressful situation, if you are upset about something, or when you are experiencing urges and cravings to use. It can help you step out of “automatic pilot”, becoming less reactive, and more aware and mindful in your response.

A way to help remember these steps is the acronym SOBER.

S – Stop. When you are in a stressful or risky situation, or even just random times throughout the day, remember to stop and do this exercise. This is the first step in stepping out of automatic pilot.

O – Observe. Observe the sensations that are happening in your body. Also observe any emotions, moods or thoughts you are having. Just notice as much as you can about your experience without judgement.

B – Breath. Allow your attention to settle on your breath.

E – Expand. Expand your awareness to include the rest of your body, to your experience, and to the situation, seeing if you can gently hold it all in awareness.

R – Respond. Respond (versus react) mindfully, with awareness of what is truly needed in the situation and how you can best take care of yourself.

SOBER breathing space

When we are faced with a difficult situation or emotion, it is very easy to run away with it and for it to spiral out of control. You have a choice, in the moment about how react to a particular situation. The ABC of mindfulness helps us to become more aware of what is happening, take time to digest the situation, and for us to react appropriately.

A - Awareness

Become aware of what you are doing, feeling or thinking. By becoming aware of your thoughts/sensations/emotions you develop a subtle sense of what is going on in your body and mind. You are not looking at the situation anymore.

B - Be with it and Breathe

Usually we react to initial uncomfortable thoughts, feelings or sensations. Mindfulness invites us to sit with and breathe into the uncomfortable thoughts rather than distracting our minds. Just be with the experience. This way we don't feed the problem. Breathe. Remember everything passes.

C - Choose

We have taken the time to experience the body sensations or thoughts so we can make considered choices rather than knee jerk reactions to our experiences.

Quick Recap!

- 1. Anxiety is normal.** Everyone experiences anxiety at times. For example, it is normal to feel anxious when on a rollercoaster, before a test or when you ask someone out for the first time. “Did you know that one in six young people under 18 will suffer from a real problem with anxiety?”
- 2. Anxiety is not dangerous.** Though anxiety may feel uncomfortable. It doesn’t last long, is temporary, and will eventually decrease! Also, most people cannot tell you when you are anxious (except those close to you such as your parents).
- 3. Anxiety can be helpful.** Anxiety helps us prepare for real danger (such as a bear confronting us in the woods), performing at our best (e.g. it helps us get ready for a big game or speech) and solving everyday problems. When we experience anxiety, it triggers our “fight-flight-freeze” response and prepares our bodies to defend themselves. For instance, our heart beats faster to pump blood to our muscles so we have the energy to run away or fight off danger. When we freeze, we may not be noticed, allowing the danger to pass.
- 4. Anxiety can become a problem** when our body reacts as if the danger in the absence of real danger. A good analogy is that it’s like the body’s smoke alarm.

The “smoke alarm” response:

“An alarm can help protect us when there is an actual fire, but sometimes a smoke alarm is too sensitive and goes off when there isn’t really a fire (e.g. burning toast in toaster). Like a smoke alarm, anxiety is helpful when it works right. But when it goes off when there is no danger, then we may want to fix it.”

QUIZ

1. Anxiety is a type of fear. Anyone can get this in their lives. True / False
 2. We can feel anxious if we think about a specific thing that may happen to us. True / False
 3. We can also feel anxious if we think about general things going wrong now or in the future. True / False
 4. It is different to fear. Fear is what we feel when we are in real danger right now. True / False
 5. Sometimes we may not know why we feel anxious. True / False
 6. Most people can get through times of feeling anxious by themselves & these feelings go away. True / False
 7. Anxiety can sometimes last much longer and can take over people's lives. True / False
 8. It can stop us doing the things we would like to be able to do. True / False
 9. It can damage our relationships with friends and family. True / False
- Many people do not ask for help about their anxious feelings. True / False

(Answers on p.22)

ANXIETY IS NORMAL,
AND I'M ALWAYS HERE
IF YOU NEED ME.



EMM
ROY

Answers : all are True



Other useful places to get help

Mental Health Foundation **Mentalhealth.org.uk**

Anxiety UK (08444 775774) **anxietyuk.org.uk**

Anxiety Care (02084783400) **anxietycare.org.uk**

Be Mindful (mindfulness) **bemindful.co.uk**

Samaritans (08457 909090) **Samaritans.org.uk**

BACP (Therapists) **bacp.org.uk**

British Psychological Society **bps.org.uk**

NHS Choices **nhs.uk**

'The Struggle Switch' (Video) **by Dr Russ Harris**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCp1l16GCXI>