## The Cycle of Anxiety



### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a natural human response to times when we may feel under threat. We may feel worried, tense or afraid about things which we think could happen. Most people feel anxious at times, particularly when coping with stressful events. Everyone's experience of anxiety is different.

Humans have developed a "fight, flight or freeze" response, to protect us from danger. Our bodiesrelease hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. This can be helpful, enabling us to generate action in our lives, or to keep ourselves safe. However, at times this response can be too much and it can become extremely debilitating.

### Anxiety

A situation which creates anxiety may lead to us experiencing symptoms such as worry, fear, sweating, trembling, repeated thoughts, increased heart-rate or feeling overwhelmed.

#### Long-term Increase

The initial fear around the situations we avoided can then get worse, as our brain learns that anxiety goes away when situations are avoided. However, the anxiety will be worse next time.

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#### **Avoidance**

To control these symptoms, we may avoid situations which make us feel anxious or try to suppress the feelings of anxiety by numbing them using drugs or alcohol.

### **Short-term Relief**

Avoiding situations which make us feel anxious can give an immediate sense of relief, and reduce feelings of anxiety. However, this relief is only temporary.

### How to break the cycle of anxiety

It can be difficult living with anxiety, but there are ways to help yourself. Healthy coping skills can help us to manage anxiety. Instead of avoidance, we can learn to face the uncomfortable feelings which anxiety causes and gain confidence in dealing with situations.