

- Anxiety

HOW TO OVERCOME ANXIETY

In part three of his series on mental wellbeing, clinical hypnotherapist Chris Meaden talks about anxiety and how to overcome it.

AS UNCOMFORTABLE AS IT might feel, anxiety is a natural emotion and can at times be a helpful response to stress and uncertainty. Nature designed anxiety as a complex emotional and physiological response to keep us safe. Thousands of years ago, our fight-or-flight reaction was crucial: alerting us to danger and preparing the body to respond. In today's world, when the threats our ancestors faced are rare, the same mechanism often misfires, leading for some, to chronic anxiety.

Chronic anxiety is more than just feeling nervous from time to time: it can interfere with daily life, relationships and overall wellbeing. It can even become overwhelming and debilitating. When everyday stressors, including social interactions, work pressures and self-imposed expectations, are interpreted as threats, this leads one to be in a constant state of alert, symptoms of which can be a racing heart, difficulty breathing, restlessness, fatigue, and digestive issues.

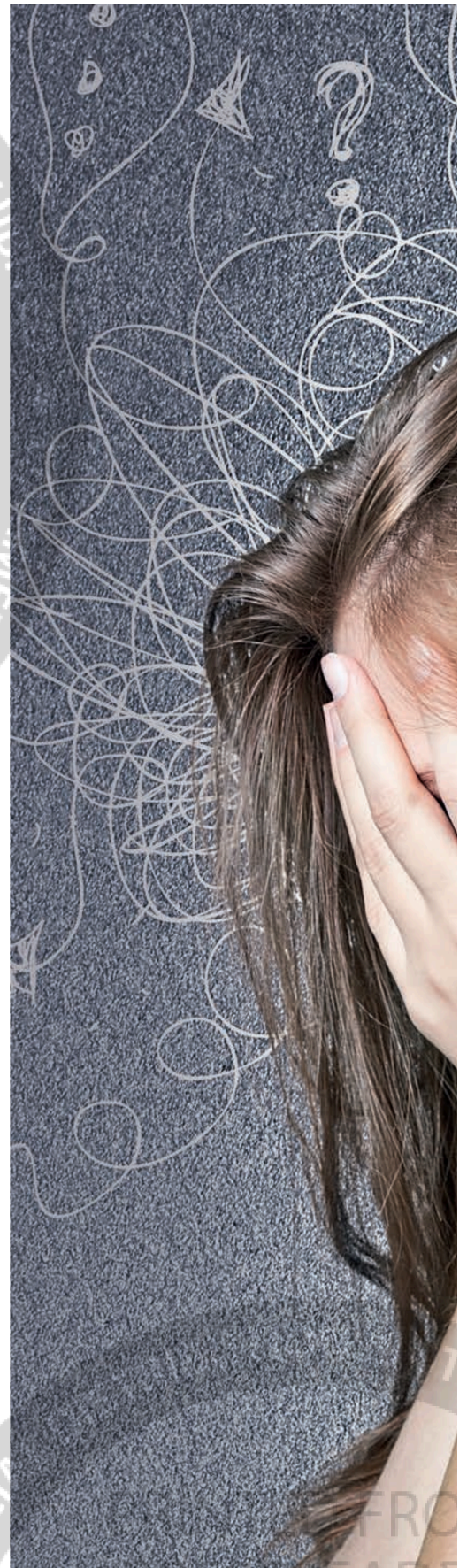
But why do some people experience anxiety more acutely than others? It's a complex interplay of genetic predisposition, brain chemistry, life experiences and personality traits. For some, anxiety may stem from unresolved trauma or prolonged periods of stress. Others may find

that perfectionism, self-doubt or overthinking amplifies their worries. Neurochemical imbalances, particularly involving serotonin and dopamine, can also contribute to heightened anxiety. Understanding these underlying factors is crucial to effective treatment. Anxiety often serves as a signal – alerting you to unresolved emotional or psychological challenges that need to be addressed.

GETTING TO THE CORE

The Meaden Method, which I developed, is a unique approach that works to resolve anxiety at its root by focusing on the amygdala – the brain's emotional processing centre – where the fight-or-flight response originates. Unlike traditional talk therapy, which often focuses on conscious thought patterns, my method works at a neurochemical level, neutralising the emotional and physical charge of past experiences.

One client, who had suffered from years of crippling social anxiety, found relief after addressing deep-seated fears stemming from early childhood. By using techniques including the Havening techniques and neurolinguistic programming (NLP), we were able to release encoded traumas, which altered her brain's response to triggers and helped her step into a more confident version of herself.



DO TRY THIS AT HOME...

While professional intervention is essential for long-term relief, there are several techniques you can use at home to help manage anxiety.

1. THE HAVENING TECHNIQUE

Havening is a simple yet effective self-soothing technique that involves gentle touch on your arms, hands or face while thinking positive thoughts. This helps to calm your nervous system, reducing your brain's emotional response to stress. When you feel anxious, gently stroke your arms, palms or face and repeat a comforting phrase such as, 'Calm, relax, safe'.

2. CONTROLLED CALMING BREATHING

The 7/11 breathing technique is a simple yet powerful way to calm your nervous system and regain control. It helps lower stress by engaging your body's natural relaxation response. To try it:

1. Find a comfortable position and sit or stand with your back straight but relaxed.
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose for seven seconds, filling your lungs gently. Breathe deeply from your diaphragm, not just your chest.
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 11 seconds, releasing tension (if seven and 11 feel too long, try a 4/6 count and build up gradually).
4. Repeat for 5-10 rounds, focusing on the rhythm of your breath.
5. Practise daily for lasting benefits in managing anxiety and stress.

3. POSITIVE VISUALISATION AND HUMMING

Begin humming a tune while you imagine a safe, calming place in your mind and immerse yourself in its details. This mental exercise can help redirect anxious thoughts and bring a sense of peace. Humming is powerful at calming and balancing your nervous system.



Chris Meaden is a leading clinical hypnotherapist at The Meaden Clinic, specialising in treating anxiety, panic attacks, PTSD and trauma with fast-working techniques to address the root cause, not just the symptoms. Visit chrismeaden.com.

● Next month: Chris talks about PTSD.

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