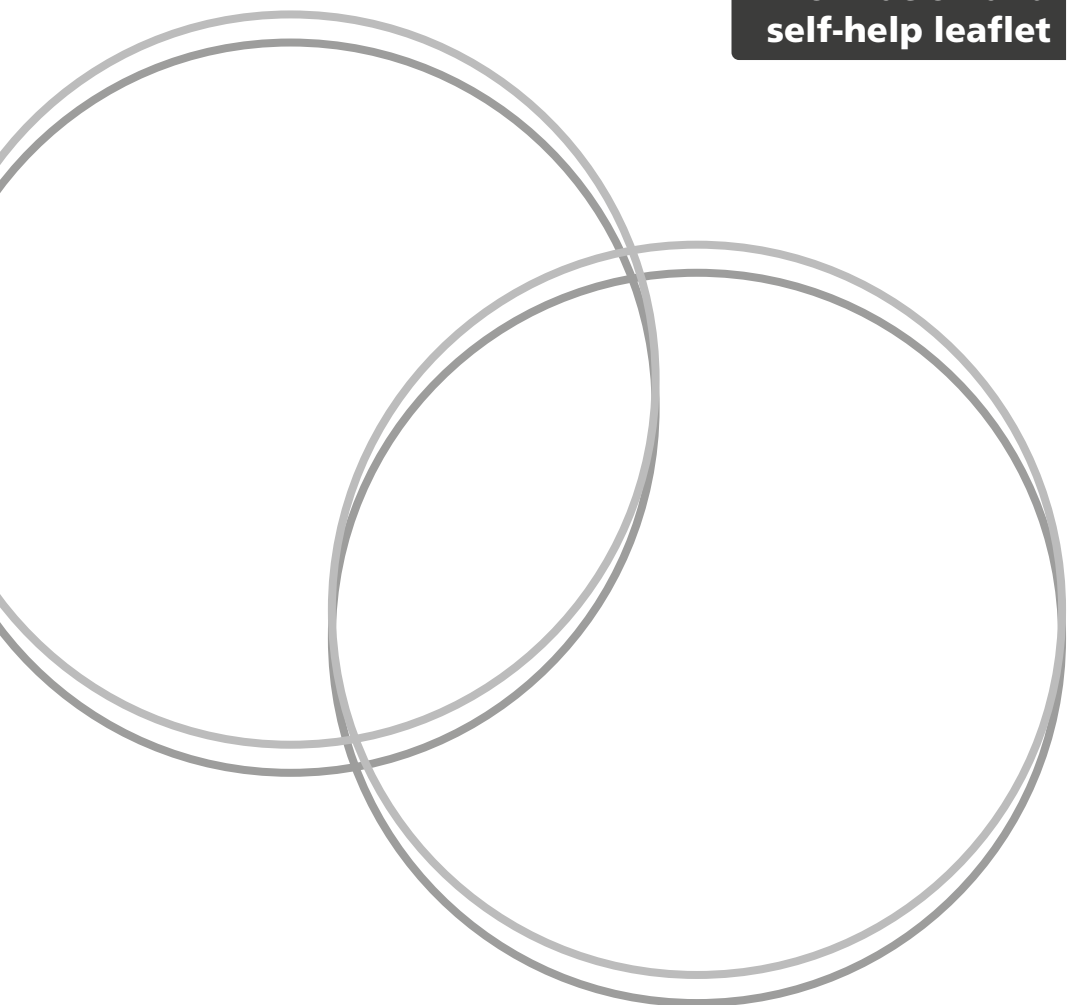




Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Anxiety and Your Sex Life

**Information and
self-help leaflet**



You have been given this leaflet because you may have anxiety. Anxiety can have an impact on your sex life. It is important that you get help to manage your anxiety before we start with psychosexual therapy. Psychosexual therapy is talking therapy that addresses sexual problems.

The information in this leaflet is from the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/generalised-anxiety-disorder/overview/

and

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/anxiety-panic-and-phobias

Visit these websites for further information and resources, including information for partners.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, worry or fear, which ranges from mild to severe. Everyone has anxiety at different times in their life, but some people find it hard to control their worries, and their anxiety affects their ability to do things they want to do.

The official name for clinical levels of anxiety that affect many different areas of your life is Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). This is different to other forms of anxiety that apply only to specific areas of your life, such as Social Anxiety or Health Anxiety. Anxiety is a feature of other clinical conditions such as Phobias (intense fear of something specific) or Panic Disorder, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is also an anxiety disorder, but this leaflet will mainly focus on Generalised Anxiety.

Anxiety affects people in different ways. When people experience GAD, they tend to feel anxious most days about a wide range of situations and issues.

Symptoms of anxiety include:

- Feeling restless or worried
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty relaxing
- Dizziness or heart palpitations
- Muscle tension
- Numbness
- Dry mouth
- Loss of libido
- Difficulty maintaining arousal or reaching orgasm

Do I have anxiety?

The following checklist can help you identify if you have anxiety.

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge.	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying.	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things.	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing.	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still.	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable.	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen.	0	1	2	3
GAD7 Total Score:				

A total score of 8 or more indicates that you might suffer from clinical levels of anxiety, which might benefit from treatment.

How can anxiety affect my sex life?

Anxiety can affect your sex life in different ways. Being anxious might mean you have less interest in sex (a lack of libido). You might also feel anxious about how your partner feels about you, or whether you will be able to become aroused (get an erection/ get relaxed and lubricated).

Anxiety and excitement can feel similar in your body, and when you get excited sexually (aroused) you may also feel more anxious. You might find this uncomfortable. It can also feel like the anxiety feelings are taking over and not letting you concentrate on how you or your partner are feeling during sex. This can get in the way of enjoying sex.

If you are on medication for anxiety, this can also affect your sex life. You may take antidepressants to help with your anxiety, and some of these can have the following side effects:

- A change in desire for sex
- Difficulties with erections in men and vaginal dryness in women
- Difficulty reaching orgasm

This depends on the medication. These symptoms have all been reported as possible side effects of citalopram, paroxetine, fluoxetine and sertraline. Other antidepressants are available, which are less likely to have sexual side effects.

If this concerns you, then it is worth discussing it with your GP or other health care provider who prescribed the antidepressants. There are strategies you can use to minimise the side effects of any antidepressant, or you might be able to try a different one or a lower dose with fewer side effects.

What help is available?

Different treatments can help with anxiety. They include medication (antidepressants – bearing in mind the point above about the side effects of some of them) and talking therapy. Talking therapy (especially Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT) is very effective for treating anxiety disorders. It does require you to be an active participant in the therapy as you will learn new strategies to manage your anxiety.

Guided Self-Help

There are different resources available online and in book form, which may be helpful as self-help courses. All of them require dedicated work and commitment. It can be hard to find the motivation to work through these programmes by yourself, but they have shown good results if you manage to stick with them:

Silvercloud

Silvercloud is a free online self-help programme.

For more details, see:

www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/oxon-talking-therapies/getting-help/online

The Centre for Clinical Interventions of the Government of Western Australia

This resource has very helpful self-help courses, all available online as PDFs to print/ download:

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Worry-and-Rumination

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Anxiety

The Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Has useful guides and leaflets on their website:

www.web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp

In addition, there are many books, which provide guidance and ideas to help you manage your anxiety:

Helen Kennerley (2014). *Overcoming Anxiety: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*. Robinson.

Russ Harris (2012). *The Happiness Trap- Strop Struggling, Start Living*. Robinson.

Talking Therapies

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a type of therapy that focuses on the problems and difficulties that you have now, and looks for practical ways you can improve your state of mind on a daily basis. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends it. The evidence suggests that it is useful in helping people manage their anxiety better.

In Oxfordshire, a free NHS service called NHS Talking Therapies offers these therapies.

You can self-refer online at:

www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/oxon-talking-therapies

or over the telephone at: **01865 901 222**

Further information

The local NHS Talking Therapies website has links to many further resources on their website:

www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/oxon-talking-therapies

How you can contact us:

Psychosexual Therapy Service
Oxfordshire Sexual Health Service
The Churchill Hospital
Old Road
Headington
Oxford OX3 7LE

Tel: **01865 231 231**

www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



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