

# Help your body deal with anxiety

Professor Sarah Niblock, CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy, and psychotherapist Lorna Evans discuss the physical side of worry, tension and stress



**Social media, world events, the pandemic and the climate emergency all contribute to**

**a modern society living with heightened anxieties. Often, when we feel anxious, symptoms arrive in our body to signal the presence of this stressful state. In our podcast this month, UKCP psychotherapist Lorna Evans and I seek to find out how movement and breath are essential to us finding grounding.**

*Sarah*

CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy

**Therapist Lorna Evans explores how anxiety affects the body and how reflection can help us find effective coping mechanisms**

**H**EALTHY STRESS CAN encourage us to get stuff done in our lives. However, consistent exposure to psychologically draining world events, for example, can have a real impact on our mind and body, and we may find ourselves on constant high alert.

We always seek to protect ourselves when anxiety takes hold, with its accompanying sense of powerlessness. It is also difficult to think rationally. This is because our body's reaction is to flood itself with adrenaline and cortisol. Once this happens, we typically respond in one of four ways: fight for survival, take flight and avoid, freeze with a sense of numbness, or fawn, where we seek to please the person who is in control to keep us safe.



When we feel under threat, our breathing changes. This is our body giving us enough oxygen to run away by pumping blood into our feet and arms so we can escape. Taking three deep breaths during anxious times is calming and helps us think sensibly again without panic.

Reflection is essential because only then can we find coping mechanisms for times of overwhelming anxious thoughts. This will give you space to ask key questions to help you work through your anxiety. For example, what are your early warning signs? What are you afraid of? What's going on with your body and sleep?

When you experience anxiety, you are in survival mode, but reflection leads to understanding, which enables you to create successful coping mechanisms for the future.

When we take a moment to breathe

and release our anxieties from our body by moving, we can start to feel safe within ourselves. Psychotherapy can also help. A therapist will provide a space of safety and understanding when you are anxious. Together, you can learn to identify your triggers, know your body and implement the right tools to help you.



## Listen to the podcast

*So much of what we come across in day-to-day life adds to our anxiousness. From news to the climate crisis, the relentless stress puts our mind and body on high alert. But what can we do to cope? UKCP's Sarah Niblock and Lorna Evans unpick the physical effects of anxiety and offer advice. Listen at [psychologies.co.uk/help-your-body-deal-anxiety-podcast-ukcp](https://psychologies.co.uk/help-your-body-deal-anxiety-podcast-ukcp)*

ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK

## HOW I BECAME A THERAPIST



*Burnout and depression led Lorna Evans into the field*

I started training as a therapist while working as a producer in the video game and television industry. Music and clubbing were a big part of my life and, although I had amazing times, the impact of this pursuit of hedonism, coupled with working in the entertainment industry, was a cocktail that led to depression, and emotional and physical depletion.

I realised that I had to change my lifestyle and look after my health. Yoga played a huge part in helping me heal and I trained to become a yoga teacher. I always wanted to understand the science behind why yoga worked, and this has now become central to my work as a psychotherapist. I am passionate about explaining the science of how breath and movement can be used as healing tools for anxiety, trauma and depression. [jesmondtherapycentre.co.uk](https://jesmondtherapycentre.co.uk)

For more information about UKCP training, go to [psychotherapy.org.uk](https://psychotherapy.org.uk)

## Knowledge, breath and action Three steps towards understanding how anxiety manifests in your body and how to alleviate the physical symptoms

**1** **Become aware.** Being conscious of how anxiety presents in your body helps you understand when you have been triggered. Often, your body can tell you about your anxiety before your mind. Where do you experience anxiety physically? Has your breath or heart rate quickened? People often notice anxiety in their chest as the body pumps blood to the heart to prepare for fight or flight.

**2** **Try this breathing exercise:** Inhale for a count of four and exhale passively for a

count of six. Taking time to breathe has an instant impact on our nervous system and brings us back to a state where we can be in the present and reflect on the cause of our anxiety.

**3** **Get moving.** Try swimming, dancing or yoga. When we move our bodies, our brains create natural serotonin, the same chemical found in most antidepressants. Building up a natural resource of serotonin can make a sizeable difference to your mental health and resilience in the long term.

## About UKCP and how to find a therapist

• **The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)** is the leading research, innovation, educational and

regulatory body working to advance psychotherapy for the benefit of all. We have a register of more than 8,000 members, who offer a range of therapy approaches for couples, individuals, families and groups. We also have more than 70 training and

accrediting organisations for those who wish to become psychotherapists.

• **To find the right therapist for you** or learn how to become a therapist, visit [psychotherapy.org.uk](https://psychotherapy.org.uk)

