

CBT For Social Anxiety

What is social anxiety disorder?

Social anxiety disorder is a persistent fear of one or more social situations where the person is afraid of doing something embarrassing or humiliating. This fear may exist because someone feels different or unacceptable to other people they come into contact with. If you suffer from social anxiety disorder, this problem is likely to interfere with your everyday life. It might also lead to other difficulties such as depression or substance and alcohol misuse.

Social anxiety disorder is a very common problem which affects about 12 per cent of the population, making it much more common than certain physical health conditions such as diabetes or arthritis. It appears that equal numbers of men and women are likely to suffer from social anxiety disorder.

People with social anxiety disorder often fear blushing, sweating, trembling or showing signs of anxiety in specific social activities (such as eating or speaking in public) or being in contact with specific types of people (such as authority figures or physically attractive people). Many will try to hide these or mask the difficulties they face by using a number of unhelpful methods such as alcohol or other substances.

When the feelings and symptoms of social anxiety are very intense, they can lead to panic attacks.

There is no single cause of social anxiety disorder. Both biological factors and bad or traumatic experiences (such as being bullied) may explain why you suffer from social anxiety disorder. However, CBT can help you to successfully overcome this problem without knowing what biological factors and/or past experiences have caused it.

CBT works

There is a great deal of research evidence to show that CBT works effectively in treating social anxiety disorder. This research has been carefully reviewed by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE).

NICE provides independent, evidence-based guidance for the NHS on the most effective ways to treat disease and ill health. CBT is recommended by NICE for the treatment of social anxiety disorder.

CBT can be used if you are on medication which has been prescribed by your GP. You can also use CBT on its own. This will depend on the difficulty you want help with.

How CBT is used to treat social anxiety disorder

After an initial assessment of your difficulties, you and your therapist will work together to go through an established series of therapy stages, which will help you achieve the following:

- Learning about the different features of social anxiety disorder
- Learning about the problems associated with certain coping behaviours and feelings of self-consciousness, along with practising how to remove them
- Changing the negative view of yourself in a wide range of social situations which provoke anxiety
- Verbally and practically changing the unhelpful thoughts and beliefs which you have when you are in a difficult social situation
- Learning to reduce or get rid of your worrying before and after any social situations which provoke anxiety
- Developing skills to ensure that you stay well and reduce the likelihood of experiencing the problems again in the future

CBT is not a quick fix. It involves hard but achievable work during the therapy sessions and between sessions, which is called 'therapy homework'. Your therapist will help you decide what difficulties you want to work on in order to help you improve your situation. Your therapist will be able to advise you on how to continue using CBT techniques in your daily life after your treatment ends.