

# Anxiety and Panic Attacks

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for anxiety and is as or more effective than medication. However, people frequently prefer CBT over medication, perceiving it to have more durable and longer-lasting effects<sup>1</sup>. At Shift Cognitive Therapy we use CBT to teach anxiety sufferers to overcome the thoughts and behaviours that maintain anxiety.

Two persistent cognitive/thinking errors fuel the anxiety reaction. Anxiety sufferers:

- a) Overestimate the dangerousness of potential threats, and
- b) Underestimate their own ability to cope with those threats.

Together, these errors activate bodily defenses unnecessarily. Perceiving the resulting arousal as dangerous, anxiety sufferers typically attempt to reduce their contact with the people, places, thoughts or things that might reactivate those frightening feelings. Although intended to reduce anxious discomfort, that strategy of avoidance actually maintains symptoms by preventing anxious people from learning that their erroneous beliefs are untrue.

CBT for anxiety often begins with education about the body's defense systems and the power of thinking errors. By increasing a person's understanding of the types of triggers that cause anxiety, clients learn to experience anxious arousal from a more logical perspective and with less fear. They then begin the process of correcting thinking errors and building up their confidence by gradually facing fears through individually tailored treatment plans. CBT treatments usually last between 10 and 20 one-hour sessions, often held at weekly intervals. Services are covered by extended health benefit plans and are tax deductible.

Notes:

1 Deacon, B & Abromowitz, JS. (2005). Patients' perceptions of pharmacological and cognitive-behavioral treatments for anxiety disorders. Behavior Therapy, 36, pp. 139-145.