

Anxiety Profile

A Quick Review

You've learned that anxiety is a mental health concern that is characterized by excessive fear, worry, and behavioral disturbances. This fear occurs when an individual overestimates the probability and severity of danger and underestimates their resources to cope with the danger. This is called the *risk/resource model*¹.

Once an individual becomes anxious, they tend to become overly focused on the things they perceive as threats. This is called *hypervigilance*. Hypervigilance is driven by the belief that being attentive to potential threats can help you avoid these threats or cope with them better. Unfortunately, being overly focused on potential threats actually has the opposite effect. It prevents you from being able to accurately perceive how much danger there actually is in a situation, causes you to view neutral situations as threatening, makes you ignore signs of safety in your environment, interferes with your performance, and leads to physiological symptoms like an upset stomach, rapid heart rate, nausea, dizziness, or difficulty breathing.

In social situations, individuals with anxiety also make negative predictions about what their social interactions will be like based on their assumptions about themselves and others in their social environment. This type of thinking is called *anticipatory processing*.

Once in the social situation, socially anxious individuals become overly focused on themselves believing that if they focus enough attention on themselves, they can evaluate and alter how they perform in social situations in order to meet the high standards they have set for themselves. This is called self-focused attention. Like anticipatory processing, this often has the opposite effect and instead reinforces or even exaggerates the negative view socially anxious individuals have of themselves.

Other aspects of anxiety include safety behaviors and post-event processing. *Safety behaviors* are actions individuals take to control or minimize their anxiety. Examples of safety behaviors include staying quiet in social situations, mentally rehearsing conversations, over-preparing for presentations and meetings, relying on alcohol or recreational drugs, avoiding eye contact, and constantly checking oneself for physical signs of anxiety. While these behaviors may reduce feelings of anxiety in the short-term, in the long-term they worsen social anxiety because they increase self-focused attention, prevent individuals from testing their fears, and lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. *Post-event processing* is the process of reviewing what happened during an event in order to perform better in the future. It also reinforces or even exaggerates the negative view socially anxious individuals have of themselves.

¹ Clark, D. A., & Beck, A. T. (2011). *Cognitive therapy of anxiety disorders: Science and practice*. Guilford Press.

Your Anxiety Profile

Each individual experiences anxiety in their own unique way. For example, some people might primarily have intrusive thoughts such as “I can’t do this” or “Things never go right for me.” Others may have physical complaints such as rapid heartrate or stomachaches. It’s likely that you may have a combination of both cognitive and physical symptoms. Understanding your individual anxiety profile; that is, your unique list of anxiety provoking situations, triggers, and anxious thoughts can provide you with key information needed to determine the most effective treatment approach for you.

Below, you will find several exercises to help you develop your anxiety profile. After completing your profile, you and your therapist can work together to develop a treatment plan to respond to your anxiety.

Identifying Your Anxiety Triggers

Using the chart below, write down any situations, thoughts, physical sensations, or events that typically lead you to experience symptoms of anxiety. Then, rate the intensity of the anxiety experienced with your triggers on a scale of 0 (not intense) to 100 (most intense).

Day/Time	Trigger	Intensity (0-100)

Identifying Your Physical Symptoms

Use the chart below to identify any physical symptoms you experience with your anxiety but first describe the anxious situation and rate the intensity of the anxiety you experienced in the situation.

1. Describe the anxious situation:

--

2. Rate the intensity of the anxiety experienced during the situation on a scale of 0 to 100.

--

Physical Sensation	Intensity of the Physical Sensation (0-100)

Identifying Your Anxious Thoughts

For many individuals, anxiety comes from the belief that some future event will be so awful that they won't be able to handle it. Use the chart below to identify any thoughts you might have about potential dangers or threats and the worst possible outcomes that you believe may be associated with these threats.

Situation (Briefly describe the situation and symptoms in this episode of anxiety)	Intensity of Anxiety (0-100)	Negative Thought (Identify what you were thinking about any potential threats or dangers during this episode)	Worst Possible Outcome (Identify what you imagine to be the worst possible outcome in this situation)