ANXIETY / PANIC DISORDER

Definition
Anxiety is a complex feeling of apprehension, fear, and worry, often accompanied by pulmonary, cardiac, and other physical sensations. It is a common condition that can be a self-limited physiologic response to a stressor, or it can persist and result in debilitating emotions. When pathologic, it can exist as a primary disorder, or it can be associated with a medical illness or other primary psychiatric illnesses (for example, depression and psychosis).

Aetiology / Risk Factors
Susceptibility to anxiety disorders appear to be associated with multiple factors (listed below). When susceptible individuals are confronted with situations, stress, or trauma, clinically significant syndromes may result. Major mediators of symptoms in the central nervous system disorders appear to be noradrenalin and serotonin, whilst other neurotransmitters and peptides, such as corticotropin-releasing factor, may be involved. Peripherally, the autonomic nervous system, particularly the sympathetic nervous system, mediates many of the symptoms.
- Genetic vulnerability
- Traumatic early life experiences
- Anxious mother
- Stress, depression, other psychiatric conditions
- Life situations (social or financial problems)

Signs and Symptoms
- Muscle tension
- Tachycardia
- Hypervigilance
- Dyspnoea
- Dizziness/near-syncope
- Palpitations
- Trembling
- Sweating
- Feelings of unreality
- Fatigue
- Impaired concentration
- Irritability
- Excessive worry/sense of impending doom
- Sighing respiration
- Sleep disturbances
**Diet and Lifestyle**

Counselling may assist in restoring self-esteem, problem solving, and coping with life stresses. Positive psychology strategies are self-treatment techniques to help control anxiety; many patients require non-pharmacological treatment and succeed with self-regulation techniques, including deep breathing, keeping a stress diary, learning objectivity and practicing resilience. Massage, aromatherapy and spa therapies have been shown to reduce anxiety. Acupuncture is effective in reducing the symptoms of anxiety. Regular exercise is crucial to reducing sympathetic nervous system over-activity and managing anxiety. Yoga, Tai Chi or other relaxing activities may also be useful. Recreational drugs should be avoided as they can aggravate symptoms and interfere with medications.

**Diet**

Patients should avoid coffee, cola and other caffeinated drinks. Reduce sugar and carbohydrates, as hypoglycaemia is a trigger for anxiety. Adequate protein provides essential amino acids for healthy neurotransmitter production. Emphasise foods high in magnesium, such as green vegetables and nuts. Small, regular meals help to regulate blood sugar. Avoid excessive alcohol consumption. Consume oily fish in the diet 3-4 times per week to boost essential omega 3 fatty acids. Avoid known food allergens.