

Helping yourself to recover from social phobia

Once a person with social phobia is receiving treatment, the process of recovery can be different for each individual. Recovery can involve both ups and downs, some days are easier than others.

The following tips may help:

- Talk to your doctor about a referral to a mental health professional who specialises in treating social phobia.
- Notice the thought patterns that contribute to your anxiety. Write these down and see if you can challenge them yourself. Then discuss them with a health professional you trust.
- Set yourself some realistic and small goals to help you manage stress better. For example, walk three times a week, join a yoga class and eat regular meals.
- Remember avoidance spreads; it seems that when a person begins to avoid one situation, it's more likely that they'll avoid others. Try instead, to face situations step-by-step. Face your fears. Set realistic goals that are directed toward things you want to achieve.
- Learn and practise anxiety management techniques, such as breathing and relaxation techniques. If practised regularly, breathing and relaxation techniques can help reduce anxiety and stress in general. *beyondblue's* website has information about reducing stress, including a guided progressive muscle relaxation exercise.
- Establish a routine. Allow time to work, but also make time to relax, do things you enjoy and spend time with family and friends.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle. To reduce anxiety, get regular exercise, have adequate sleep, eat a balanced diet, and limit your intake of alcohol and other stimulants, such as caffeine.

For more information see the 'Recovery and staying well' section of the *beyondblue* website at www.beyondblue.org.au



How to help someone recover from social phobia

Family and friends can play an important role in helping a person with social phobia to recover. There are also ways in which you can help yourself to cope with caring for a person with social phobia.

- The more you know about the condition, the more help you will be.
 - Acknowledge that the person has an anxiety disorder and is not just being difficult; the anxiety is a very real and distressing experience.
 - Encourage the person to seek professional help by letting him/her know what services are available and offer to accompany the person when he/she visits the health professional.
 - Don't involve yourself in the person's avoidance of objects or situations that make him/her anxious. Instead, encourage the person to face their fears step-by-step.
 - If appropriate, offer practical support, such as being with the person when they face their fear – if that is what the person wants.
 - Encourage the person to challenge unrealistic or anxious thoughts.
 - Acknowledge any gains the person makes, no matter how small.
- Work with the person to re-establish a daily routine that includes enjoyable and/or relaxing activities.
 - Encourage the person to maintain a healthy lifestyle and participate in social activities.
 - Don't expect too much too soon; recovery can take a while and there may be some ups and downs.
 - Find emotional support for yourself – dealing with and caring for a person with social phobia can be difficult at times. You may need support too. This may involve attending a support group; individual, couple or family counselling; or educational sessions.

For more information see *beyondblue's* free booklet 'A guide for carers', available at www.beyondblue.org.au or by calling 1300 22 4636.