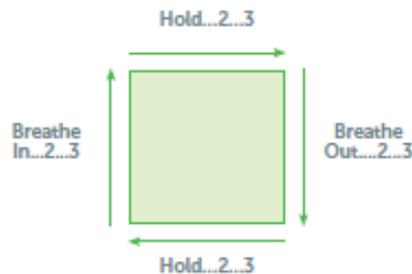


• **Square breathing**

Slowing down your breathing can be a really good way of helping the muscles in our bodies to relax.

Step one: Sit or lie comfortably. You can close your eyes or keep them open – whatever feels better for you.

Step two: Repeat the square three times or until you feel relaxed. Some people find it helpful to imagine the tension flowing out of their body as they ‘breathe out...2....3’.



• **The worry box**

If you have lots of worries on your mind you could write them down on a piece of paper and put this in a box next to your bed. This will keep the worries safe overnight. You can then look at them the next day and talk them through with your friends or family.

• **Distraction**

Distraction forces your brain to think about other things, so there is less space left for stress or worry. Distraction helps to stop your brain focussing on negative thoughts and takes your attention away from stress or danger. Common ideas are TV, reading, singing, counting things you can see, hear,

smell, visualising your ideal house, football team or holiday in as much detail as possible.

• **Positive self-talk**

Sometimes it helps to remind yourself of your strengths and what helps you to cope with worry. You could write these on a piece of paper and keep it in your pocket, to look at when you are worried. For example, 'I stayed calm before, I can stay calm again.'

• **Know your rescue kit**

Always carry your rescue medication and make sure you know how to use it!

Contact numbers

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Paediatric Allergy Team on 0118 322 7224.

Our 'Useful contacts' leaflet has more information on external support.

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
London Road, Reading RG1 5AN
www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Based on Managing Worries about Allergies by the Children's Clinical Psychology Team Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust

RBFT Paediatric Allergy Team, February 2020.
Review due: February 2022

NHS

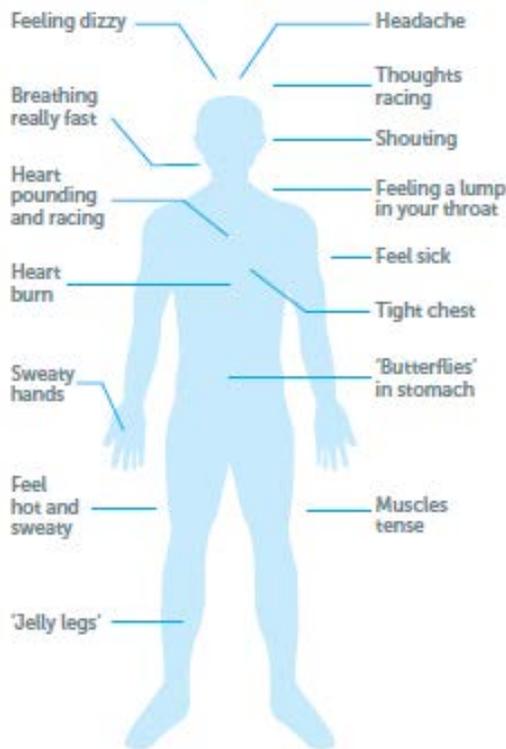
Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Allergies and anxiety

Understanding worries and how to manage them

This leaflet offers general advice regarding anxiety about food allergies for children, young people and their families.

Many young people who have allergies also experience anxiety, which is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease. This factsheet talks about the body's reaction to worry and includes some tips on things you can do to help.



What is anxiety?

Stress or anxiety occurs if our brain thinks we might be in danger. The body's natural reaction is to get ready to 'fight' or 'flight'

(run away) and has been human nature since the days of cavemen and dinosaurs. However, stress or anxiety can sometimes be triggered when there is no actual danger. For example, a person who is scared of spiders might act as if a spider is dangerous, even though the spider cannot hurt them. This is a false alarm! Lots of things happen in our bodies during the 'fight or flight' response. These are caused by the central nervous system telling the body to get ready to fight or to run away from the danger.

Links between allergies and anxiety

Many young people with allergies get worried sometimes. This is really normal. We are taught to avoid something that could harm us, so it is natural to be wary. There are some common worries that many young people with allergies have. These include trying new foods, eating at parties or friends' houses, being near someone who is eating something they are allergic to and eating outside the home.

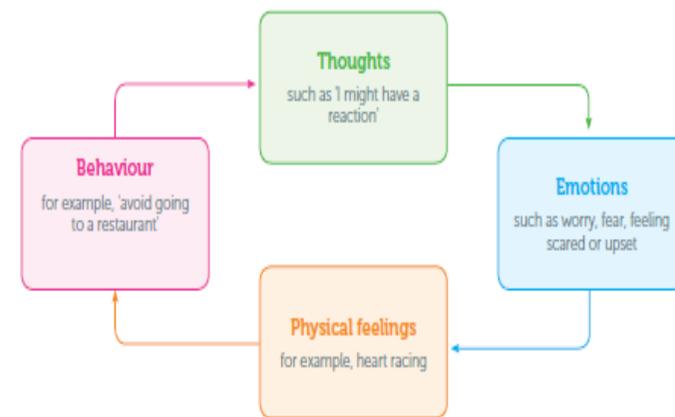
Body reaction to worry and allergies

The worry reaction in our bodies can be very similar to an allergic reaction. For example, worry makes our throats feel tight, like there is a ball stuck in it. Also, worry can make us breathe faster and make our heart beat faster. This sometimes feels like we are having an allergic reaction.

If this happens it is important to calm the body down – try doing some 'Square breathing' and sitting quietly for a moment. If it is worry, then the feelings should go away. If you think you might have eaten or touched something you are allergic to, and your body still doesn't feel right, then you should follow the advice in your allergy action plan.

The anxiety cycle

There are four main parts to worry: thoughts, emotions, physical feelings and behaviour. They all affect each other, so changing any one part will change the others.



Ways to manage worry

Relaxation techniques are a way of managing your feelings. When relaxation techniques are practised and used regularly, they will change thoughts, feelings and behaviour; breaking the cycle of stress or anxiety.