

Dealing with Climate Anxiety

Australia has already experienced increases in average temperatures over the past 60 years, with more frequent hot weather, fewer cold days, shifting rainfall patterns and rising sea levels leading to erratic weather events.

While scientists, campaigners and some politicians have warned about the adverse effects of global temperatures rising for decades – these heatwaves, droughts, floods have become a regular fixture of our news cycles and our social media feeds in recent memory and have played out in front of our very eyes. This has led to the term ‘climate anxiety’ being coined by those raising the alarm about the adverse effects of climate change on our mental health.



WHAT IS CLIMATE ANXIETY?

Put simply, climate anxiety (or eco-anxiety) is a sense of fear, worry or tension linked to climate change.

Fundamentally, it is an adaptive emotional reaction to a very real threat and is not a clinical condition. However, in some cases climate anxiety can become so intense as to become classified as an adjustment disorder or even an anxiety disorder.

People who are experiencing climate anxiety can suffer from a range of emotions that can be separated into general clusters:

1

Amazement when receiving information about how bad the ecological situation is in the world. Surprise at the slow ecological recovery or lack of progress made in reducing carbon emissions.

Disappointment in the general lack of urgency.

Confusion about climate change and how they're feeling about it.

2

Shock about the vastness of the devastation climate change brings.

Trauma following a major disaster and 'pre-traumatic stress' in anticipation of harmful environmental changes.

Isolation if one's community does not recognise the validity of your feelings about climate change or action.

3

Anger rooted from the injustice and corruption around climate change inaction.

Rage as a psychological or psychosocial defence against threats felt to self and/or group identity.

Frustration that growing awareness is not leading to enough action.

4

Strong anxiety manifesting when a person simply cannot handle their feelings and a fear that one cannot 'feel better'.

Depression caused by a sense of worthlessness, guilt and shame that they're perhaps not doing enough to change the situation and feelings that 'nothing can be done about it'.

Numbness in response to not being able to handle difficult emotions — this is made worse if a person feels powerless.

5 THINGS PEOPLE CAN DO TO DEAL WITH CLIMATE ANXIETY

While some anxieties can develop into a disorder, in many cases, taking action on a personal level can help remedy anxieties and manage what's in our control.

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1. Give your time to an environmental cause

While we can't solve the world's environmental issues on our own, actions that help the planet can have positive effects on multiple levels. It can initiate positive actions amongst others, as well as improve our own climate anxiety. You could reach out to your local government and find out how you can volunteer in your local community to improve the places you love and live in. Action might include cleaning streets, parks and beaches of litter, or simply minimising your own household waste.



2. Educate yourself further

Getting accurate information from credible news sources about the environment can empower you and help you feel prepared and resilient if a crisis occurs. Relying on inaccurate information or having a lack of information can make climate change hard to understand and process.

3. Foster resiliency

People who feel positively about their ability to overcome stress and trauma may handle anxiety better than people with less confidence in their resiliency skills. To improve these, practicing mental fitness techniques is key, where you set achievable goals and moving steadily toward them. These goals can range from improving personal connections to focusing on a positive self-image.

4. Know when to disengage

Without realising it, your feelings can be influenced by the information you see each day in the media, politics, advertising, and on social media platforms. Seeing this information over and over again can



cause stress, especially if it is inaccurate, biased, or presented in a hyperbolic way. Although it's good to be a well-informed citizen, being

exposed to an overwhelming amount of information or lots of untrustworthy information can create anxiety. Reevaluating sources of environmental information or cutting back from certain media sources, even temporarily, may help reduce your stress levels.

5. Being active

Exercise is a fantastic way to reduce anxiety. Using your car contributes to greenhouse gasses so, if you can, why not walk to work or to your commuter station? Furthermore, studies have also shown that people who regularly cycle or walk, either entirely or part way to work, experience lower levels of commuting stress.



While extreme anxiety may become problematic, climate anxiety has emerged because it is something of a "necessary evil. The damage to ecosystems is so vast and inaction is so widespread that some degree of eco stress can be beneficial in promoting positive action. That being said, if you are dealing with severe eco-anxiety, or anxiety that does not respond to self-care management tips, you may need professional help to address your anxiety.

See your doctor or, to talk to a mental health professional, talk to one of our friendly staff at Converge by visiting our website convergeinternational.com.au or calling **1300 687 327**.

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