

Tip sheet

Climate anxiety

New Zealand, like much of the world, has seen noticeable changes in its climate over the last decade. These shifts are showing up in our newsfeeds more and more, as terms like 'heatwaves' and 'floods' become more familiar. As a result, there's been increasing awareness of 'climate anxiety' – the emotional toll climate change can have on our mental health.



What is climate anxiety?

Climate anxiety refers to feelings of worry, fear, or stress tied to the impacts of climate change. It's a perfectly natural response to a very real issue and isn't considered a medical condition in most cases.

However, in some people, the stress can be overwhelming, sometimes leading to more serious anxiety or adjustment disorders.

People experiencing climate anxiety might go through a range of emotions, often falling into the following categories:

Shock

Some are taken aback by the magnitude of environmental change or surprised at the slow pace of recovery and the ongoing carbon emissions.

Isolation

It can be hard if those around you don't acknowledge or share your concerns about climate change.

Confusion

Frustration over a perceived lack of urgency and confusion about their own feelings.

Anxiety and depression

Some may feel overwhelmed by fear or guilt that they're not doing enough, leading to depression or a sense of helplessness.

Fear

Experiencing or anticipating natural disasters can lead to stress and despair.

Anger

A sense of injustice or a perceived lack of meaningful action from governments or other people can lead to anger and frustration.

Numbness

For others, the emotional load becomes too much, leading to a sense of emotional detachment or numbness, especially when they feel powerless.

5 ways to cope with climate anxiety

Though climate anxiety is a normal response, there are a few steps you can take to help manage these feelings.

Learn more

Sometimes the scariest part of climate change is feeling like we don't fully understand it. By educating yourself through reliable sources, you can feel more prepared and less overwhelmed. The more you know, the better you'll be at identifying solutions and staying grounded during environmental crises.

Build your resilience

Resilience doesn't happen overnight, but working on your mental fitness can help you manage anxiety better. This could be through setting personal goals, improving your support network, or focusing on self-care practices. The better equipped you feel to handle life's challenges, the easier it will be to manage climate anxiety.

Get moving

Exercise is one of the best ways to combat anxiety. It also doubles as a climate-friendly habit. Instead of driving, why not walk or bike to your destination? Not only will you cut down on your carbon footprint, you'll also boost your mood and reduce stress. Studies show that those who walk or cycle regularly tend to experience lower levels of commuting stress.

Get involved

Taking action can be an antidote to feeling helpless. While you can't solve everything, contributing to your local environment can help shift the tide in small but meaningful ways. You could get involved in beach clean-ups, join local sustainability initiatives or even start a composting project at home. Small actions can add up, and knowing you're contributing can ease the weight of climate stress.

Take breaks from the news

Constant exposure to bad news – especially through social media – can amplify stress. While staying informed is important, it's also okay to take breaks from the constant stream of climate news. Curate your news sources to include reputable and balanced information, and give yourself space when needed.

While climate anxiety can sometimes feel overwhelming, it's important to remember that these feelings reflect the seriousness of the situation. In some ways, climate anxiety serves as a motivator, nudging us toward positive action.

However, if your eco-anxiety is becoming too much to handle or affecting your day-to-day life, consider seeking professional support.

Reach out to your doctor or a one of our team at Vitae to talk through your concerns. You can reach us 24/7 at 0508 664 981, email assistance@vitae.co.nz or visit our website at www.vitae.co.nz to find an appointment.



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