

Talk 3: Adjusting to life with an ICD



Aims for the session

- Introduction to Clinical Health Psychology Services
- Reactions to ICDs
- Anxiety and low mood link
- Common traps and how to overcome them



Past feedback of ICDs

“It's okay to feel apprehensive and a bit scared, it's a normal feeling and these will get easier as time goes by.”

(previous attendee at ICD information morning)

- Up to 95% of people with an ICD would recommend the procedure to someone else



Impact of changes to physical health/having an ICD



Common concerns for those living with an ICD

People have reported concerns about:

- Physical consequences of having a device (aware of device, fears of knocking it/damaging it).
- ICD giving shocks (not knowing what to do, pain, how it will feel).
- Uncertainty about the future ('device in charge', malfunction).
- Pushing myself too far (driving, physical activity, sex).



The numbers...

13 – 38% of people
experience longer term
anxiety following an ICD

24 – 46% of people
experience low mood

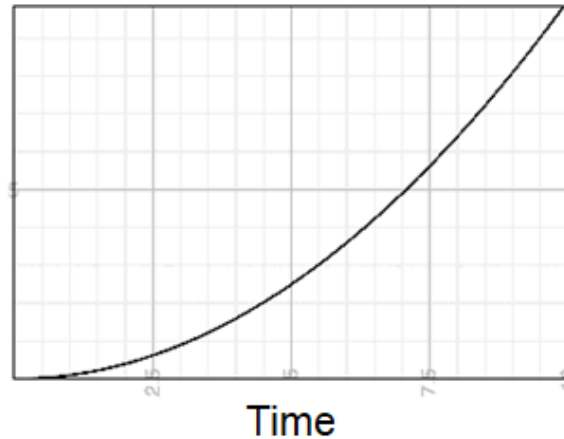
10 – 15% of people
experience PTSD type
symptoms

QUALITY OF LIFE



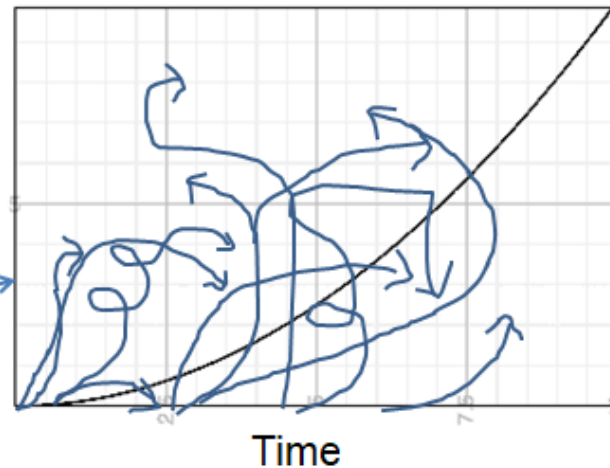
What is adjustment?

Adjustment



What you expect

Adjustment



What actually happens

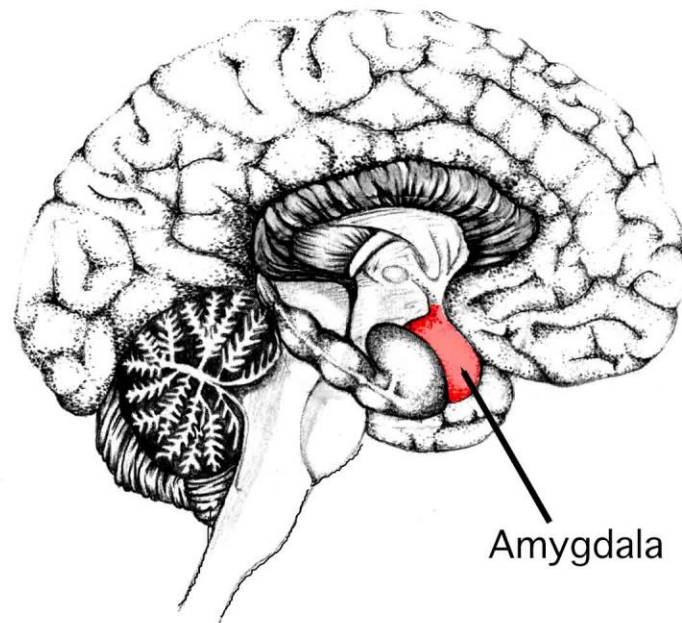
You may feel that you sometimes move between different emotional reactions (such as grief, shock, feeling hopeless)



What is anxiety?



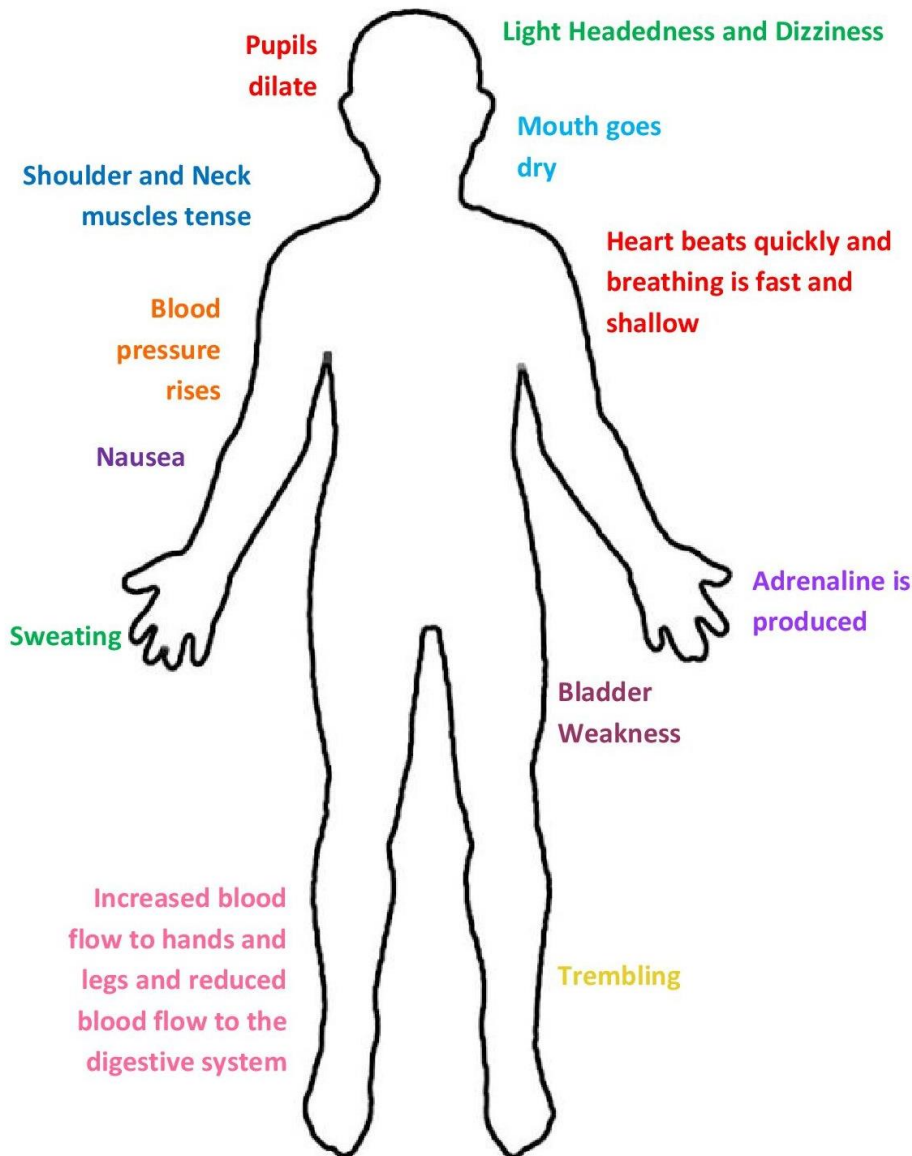
The threat system – ‘Reptilian brain’



The 'old brain'

- Previously our threat system kept us safe by helping us run from predators and fight enemies (Fight or flight)
- The amygdala receives information about the threat response before we even have time to think about it. It helped us to predict threat – and respond quickly
- It employs a 'better safe than sorry' policy
 - It's not interested in being right or wrong, it's aim is to keep you safe and alive.

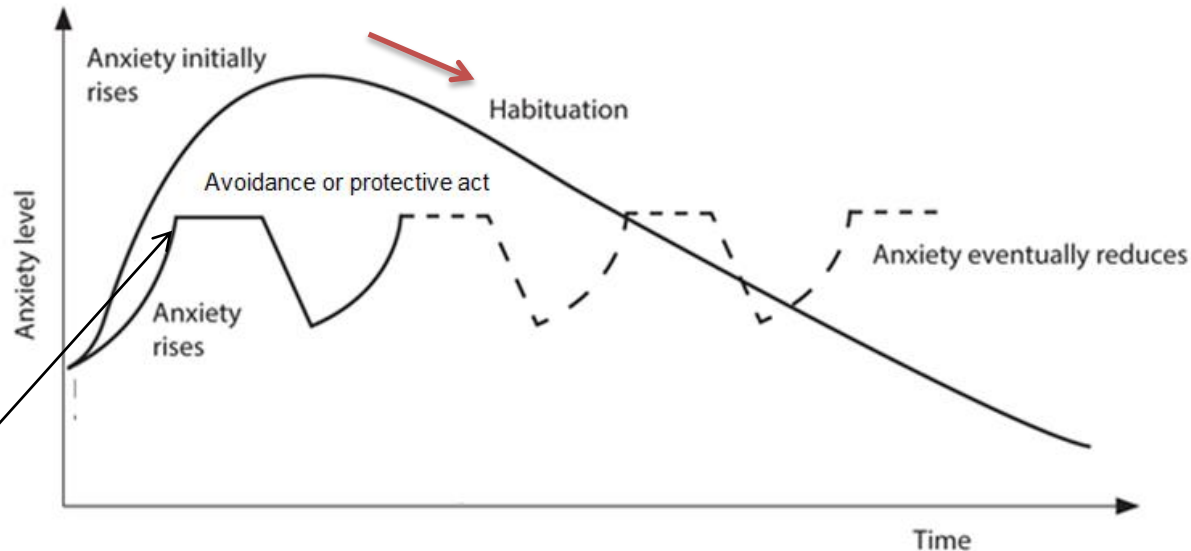




Fight or flight response



The fear curve



- Avoid exercise
- Avoid leaving the house
- Avoiding places/things associated with ICD shock
- Avoiding difficult emotions/push thoughts away
- Checking heart rate
- Getting reassurance from others



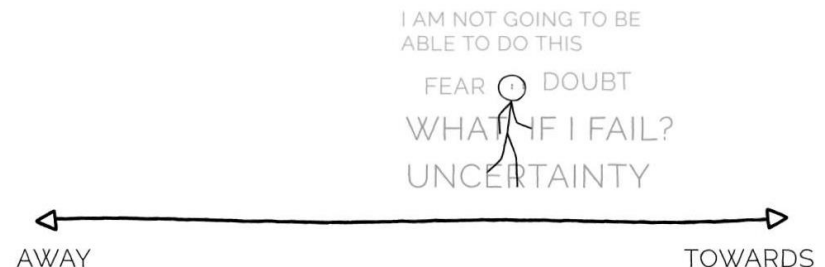
The trouble with avoidance

Avoiding situations or experiences because of anxiety has short term and long term consequences

Anxiety can 'generalise' and cause more avoidance in more and more situations, thereby making the anxiety difficulties worse.

The more you try to push anxiety away, the bigger it gets, the more control it seems to have.

Avoidance can mean that we miss out on valued and important aspects of our lives.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-ZuqeyxULM>



Panic attacks

- Panic attacks are a commonly encountered acute anxiety response (flight)
- Triggered by a specific situation
- Thoughts of losing control, passing out, dying (characterised by a high level of threat)
- They typically peak within last for approximately 10-15 minutes
- Physiological changes – the role of adrenaline
- Presence of low mood following panic attacks is common



Post traumatic stress

- A response that can be triggered when there has been a real or perceived threat to life.
- Characterised by nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts/images of event, high levels of anxiety.
- These are normal responses following a difficult event.
- If these experience persist for much longer, please seek advice from your GP or health care team.



Why do we get low mood?



Lion cubs in the cave

- When presented with a stressful situation we can not resolve our brains have evolved to slow down our bodies.
- Lion cubs who can't find their parents will call out for a while, then eventually retreat to the back of a cave to conserve energy. The cubs who wandered out of the cave were less likely to survive.
- The human brain does something very similar – we can 'retreat to the back of the cave'
- However, when translated to 21st century this is not always a useful mechanism

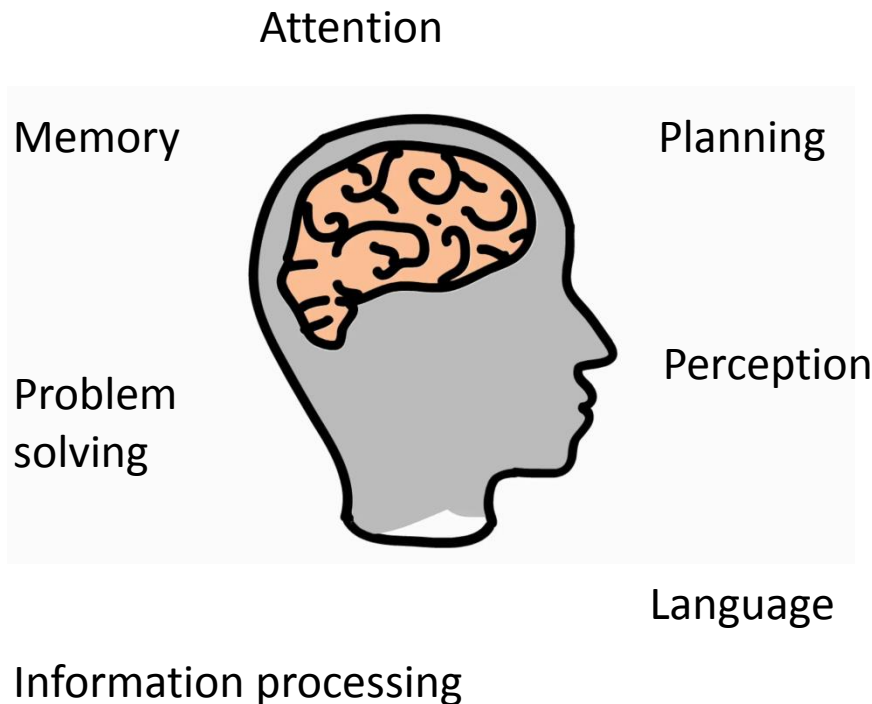


Low mood

- Low mood can occur in response to threat
 - Either to yourself, family or close friends
- We may notice low mood as:
 - Changes to appetite/sleep
 - Loss of energy, feeling tired and lethargic
 - Feeling worthless, helpless or hopeless
 - Loss of interest in activities
 - Decreased motivation



Impact on cognitive skills



- Following a cardiac event, some people may notice changes in any of these domains.
- These changes can be associated with a number of things, including mood, anxiety, trauma, neurological changes, sleep, substances etc.



Overcoming low mood and anxiety



Tackling physiological changes: Breathing and relaxation

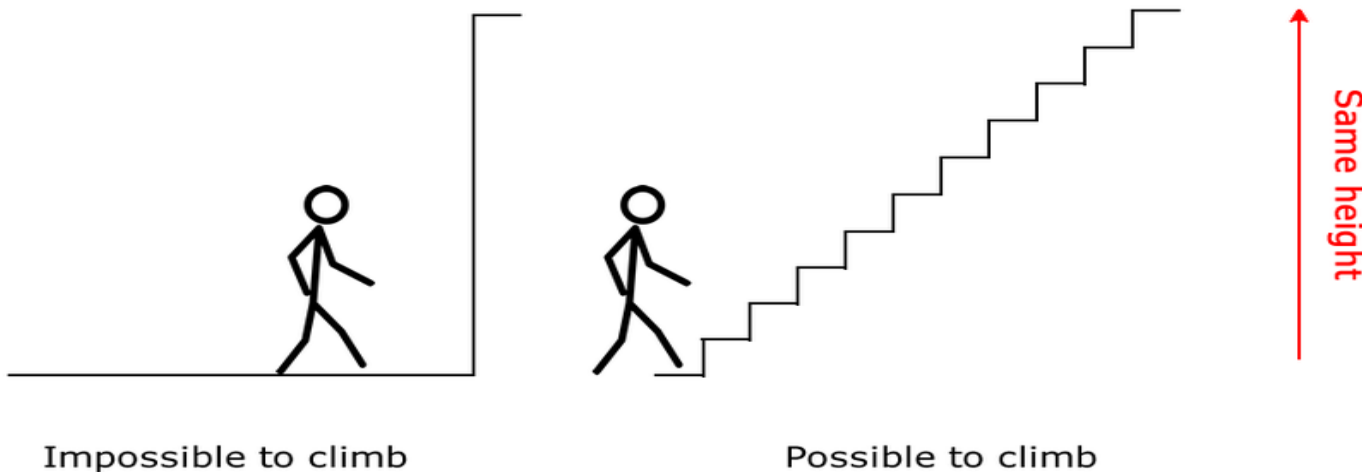
- Helps to slow down the systems in the body that speed up when we are anxious
- Relaxation response:
 - Reduce Heart rate
 - Improve Sleep and concentration
 - Reduce Muscle tension
 - Reduce Pain
 - Feel more in control
- By practicing the skill of relaxed breathing you are learning to cope more effectively with stress/anxiety (do it when you're not stressed too!)



Tackling avoidance/protective behaviours

- Notice times when you are avoiding / using protective behaviours
- It may be useful to make a list of the things you avoid or the behaviours you use
- Start small: identify the situations on your list that you might find easier to face.
- Ask family or friends to support you!





- Break down the task into small steps
- Start to face the thing you have avoided/used a protective behaviour for
- Remember it will feel uncomfortable at first, but it will get better!
- Small steps will lead to big changes.



Get SMART

- Plan and schedule enjoyable activities, really important!
- Set **SMART** goals

Specific – who/where/when

Measurable – how will you know you've achieved it

Achievable - make sure the goal is actually doable

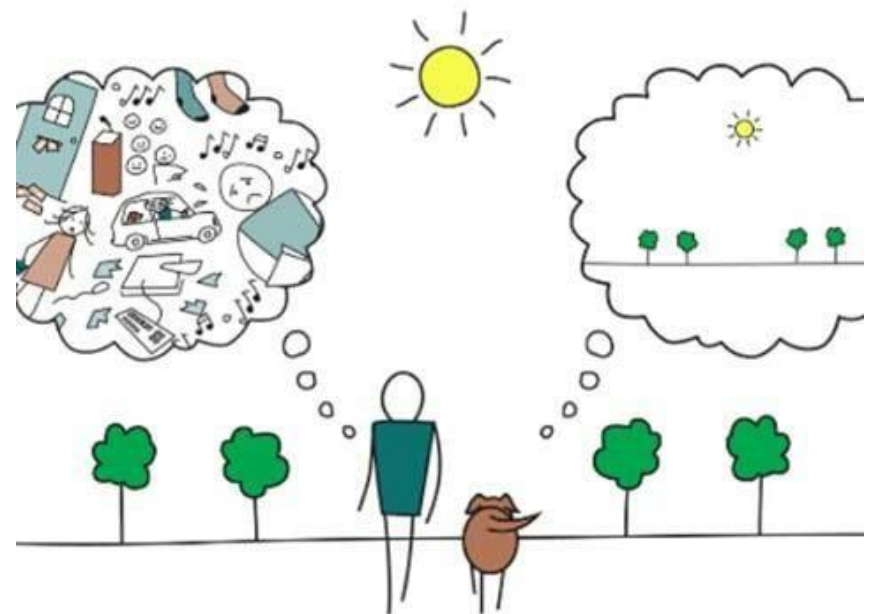
Realistic – do you have the resources (e.g. time, energy, money)

Timed – How long will you pursue this goal, how long will it take to do?



Mindfull or Mindful?

- Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.



Mind Full, or Mindful?



Problem solving

- Practical coping:
 - Use your Shock Plan
 - Speak to your ICD/Heart Failure Nurse - ask questions
 - Let people know you need support
- What can you do right now in this moment that can help? Controlled breathing / distraction?
- What can you do in the future that can help?
 - Make a plan



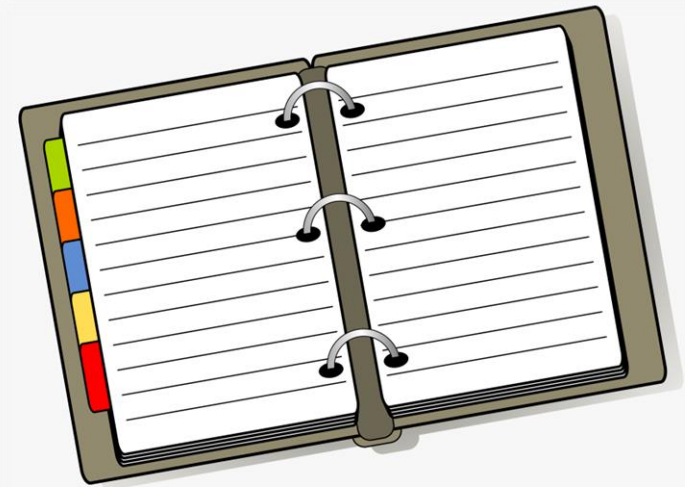
Social/emotional support

- Remind yourself that you're in a period of adjustment – most of what you are thinking or feeling is 'normal' (even though it might not be very pleasant)
- Focus on things that you CAN control
- Speak to people about how you feel and get their perspective
 - Friends and family
 - GP
 - ICD/Heart Failure Nurses
 - Clinical Psychologist (LHCH)
 - Support Groups (BHF, Arrhythmia Alliance)



Supporting cognitive skills

- Take regular breaks
- Break tasks down into small chunks
- Use practical reminders:
 - Using a diary
 - Reminders on phone
 - Calendar
 - Prompts from family/friends



Useful resources

- Mindfulness apps such as Headspace, Calm
 - <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>
- Books on Mindfulness
 - Miracle of Mindfulness by John Kabat-Zin
- Samaritans 116 123
- If you feel that you are unable to keep yourself safe, please speak to your GP and A&E.



Thank you for listening 😊



Arrhythmia Alliance
www.arrhythmiaalliance.org.uk

British Heart Foundation
www.bhf.org.uk

www.youngcarers.com

NHS Choices – Carers direct
• **Tel: 0808 802 0202**

Citizens Advice Bureau—
www.adviceguide.org.uk

DVLA
DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU
WWW.DVLA.gov.org
Tel: 0300 790 6806

NHS Direct
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk