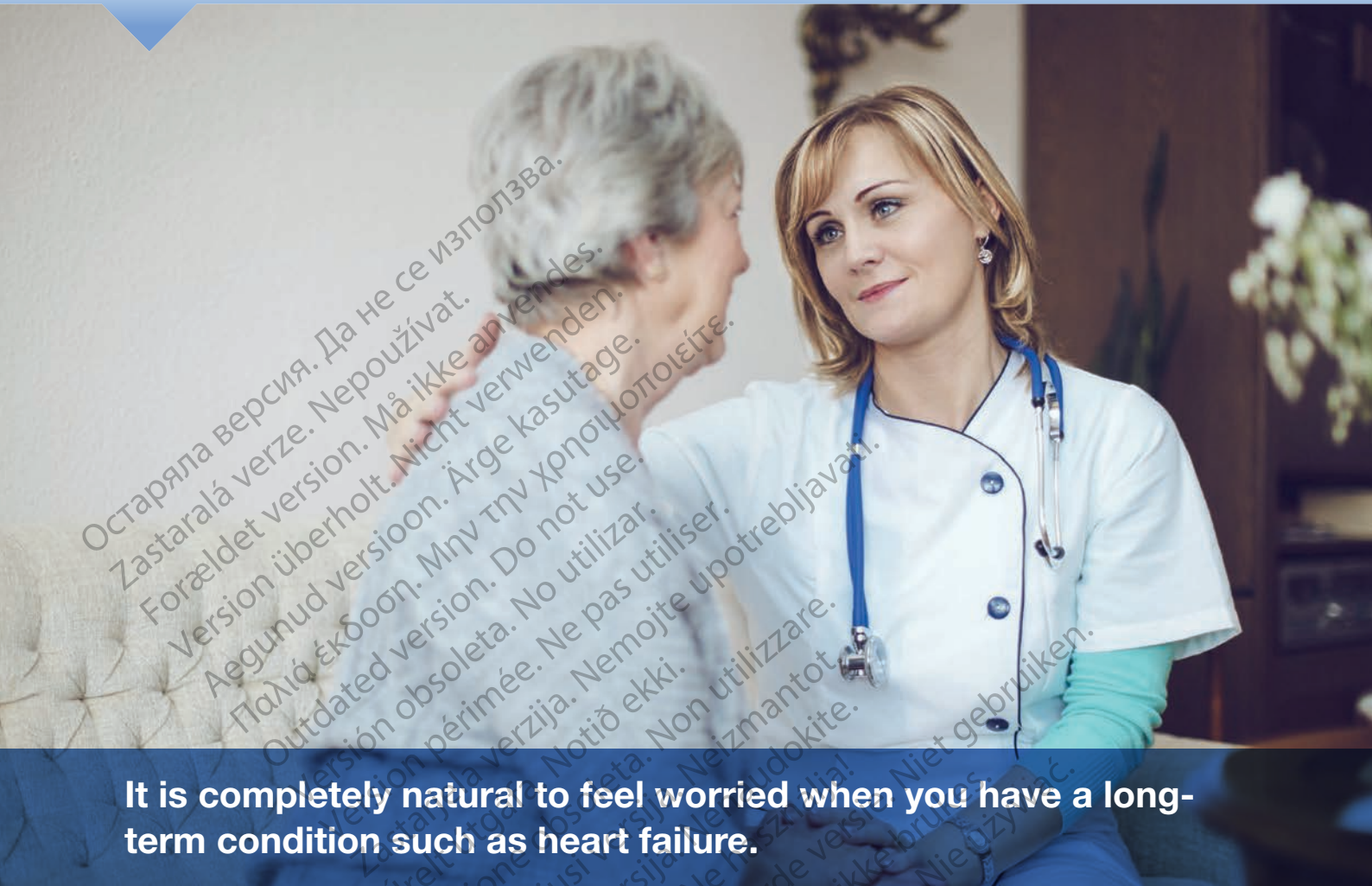




Managing anxiety (worry)

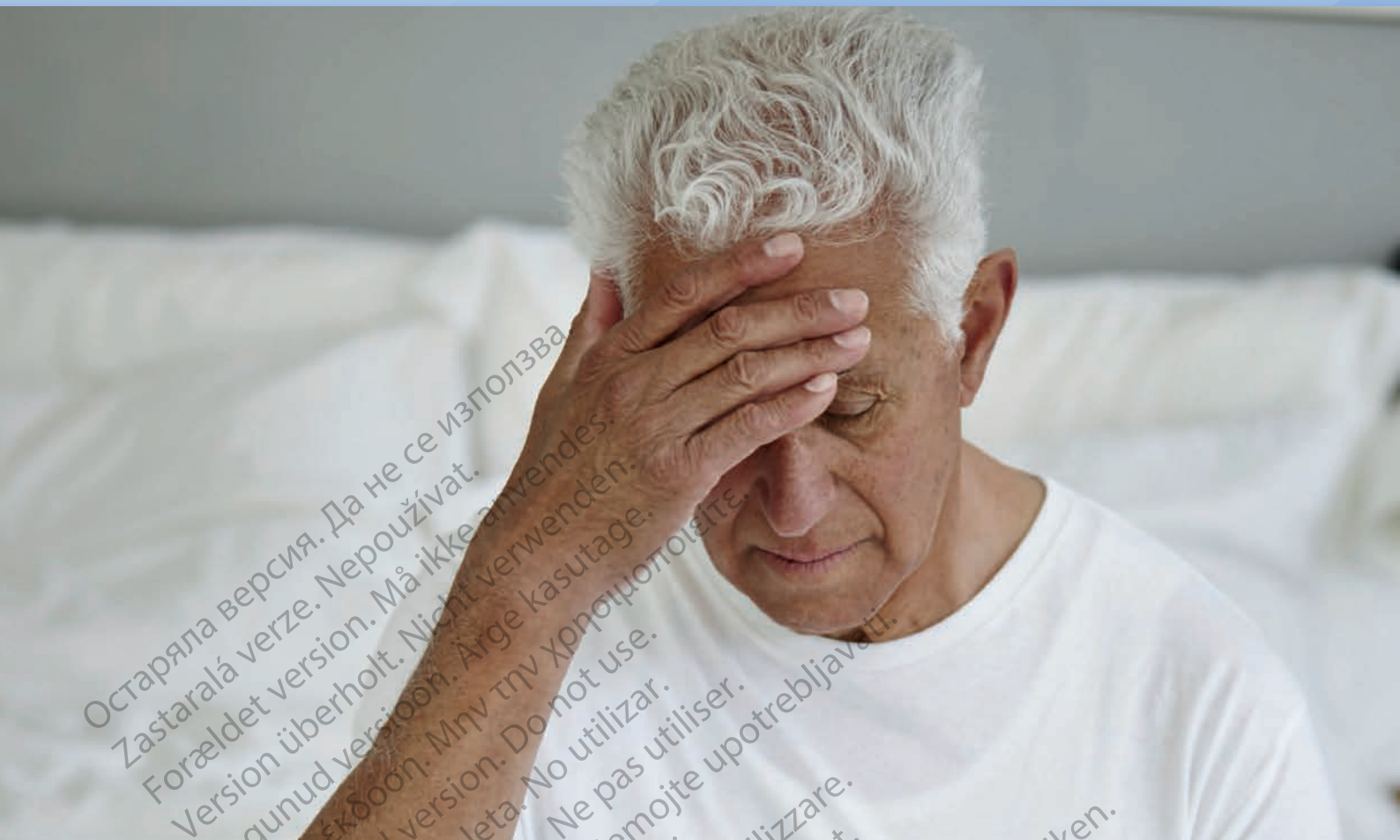


It is completely natural to feel worried when you have a long-term condition such as heart failure.

In particular, having heart failure may cause you to worry about the future. Some people are worried about the future or are concerned about the effects of their condition on their ability to work, or their relationships.

While it is normal to be concerned, we know that anxiety may have unwanted effects on people who have a long-term condition. For example, people with heart failure who are anxious may be admitted to hospital more often than those who are not anxious¹.

Fortunately, there are ways of dealing with anxiety. That is why it can be a very good idea to discuss your worries with a member of your healthcare team.



Symptoms of anxiety

Lots of people recognise the feelings of anxiety in themselves, but you can be anxious without realising it. Some of the symptoms may go un-noticed, or you may not know that what you are experiencing is the result of anxiety. If you are anxious you may experience^{2,3,4}.

Irritability

**Feeling worried
all or most of
the time**

Tense muscles

**Being 'on edge'
and unable
to relax**

**Being easily
startled**

Sleep problems



We recommend you use a diary to keep track of your feelings and share it with a member of your healthcare team, if you need to. Doing this can really help you to feel better.



Dealing with anxiety

There are various ways of dealing with anxiety, including techniques that you can try for yourself at home. You may find it helpful to use some of the following techniques:

POSTPONE YOUR WORRY

Postponing worry is really helpful. It reminds us that we don't have to think about our problems all of the time.

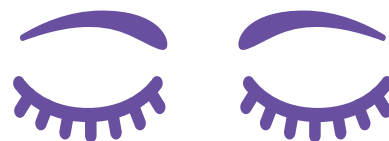
The next time you find yourself worrying, try saying to yourself, "worrying about this now is not going to do any good and anyway, I have better things to do. I will worry about this later - say, at 8 o'clock tonight".

Often when we get to our scheduled 'worry time', we usually realise that we don't need to worry after all. What time will you re-schedule your worries for? It's the on kind of appointment that you are definitely encouraged to make and then miss!



RELAXATION PRACTICE

Relaxation breathing strategies can also help you to worry less and feel better^{5,6}. Here is one you could try:



1

Sit in a comfortable place and close your eyes.

2

Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose while counting to four.

Notice the sense of your body expanding and rising with each breath you take in.

3

Breathe out slowly and as you do so, count to six or eight.

Focus on the feeling of the chest and belly falling and relaxing with each breath you exhale.

4

Repeat this process at least four times.

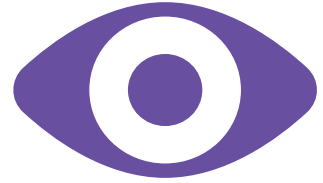
Feel any better? Repeat often, lightly and gently, and notice how your feelings change. Often people describe a lighter, looser, more relaxed feeling following this exercise. If you have any concerns about it, or experience any breathlessness or discomfort for example, then you should discuss this with your doctor next time you meet with them.


Relaxation breathing strategies can also help you to worry less and feel better^{5,6}.



VISUALISATION

Anxious thoughts can be tiring and difficult. Maybe you could take a break from them using visualisation? Here is one way to do this:



- **Set a timer (for example, on your mobile phone) for 10 minutes.**
 - **Sit comfortably and relax into your seat.**
 - **Take some long, slow and refreshing deep breaths.**
 - **Close your eyes.**
 - **As you sit and relax, let your mind wander to a calm place - this can be real or imaginary.** Your calm place should be somewhere that you feel relaxed and happy, perhaps a beach, lake or forest, or a room you like to rest in.
- Your calm place should be somewhere that you feel relaxed and happy.**
- 
- **Use your imagination to truly experience that calm place.** What can you see and hear? How does your body feel? How warm or cool are you, can you feel a breeze, or the warmth of the sun on your skin? As you breathe and sit in a relaxed way, allow your imagination to bring this picture to life in your mind, and immerse yourself in the experience of being there. Focus on each of your senses – what can you feel, see, smell, hear and even taste?
 - **When your timer rings to end the visualisation, try to remember your calm place – and why not see if it's helpful to 'revisit' it the next time you feel tense or anxious?**

MINDFULNESS

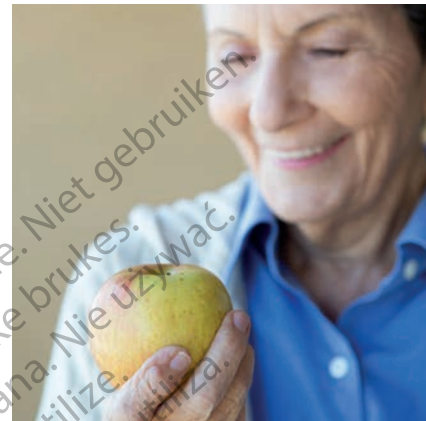
Mindfulness is a powerful approach to managing anxiety. In mindfulness we pay attention to what is happening in the present moment, without drifting off into the constant chatter of anxious thoughts.

For example, when we eat mindfully, we pay careful attention to each mouthful, the tastes and textures of our food.

Having a mindful shower would mean paying attention to the warmth of the water, the scent of soap or shampoo. There are lots of opportunities to bring mindfulness into our day-to-day activities.

For example, as you walk you could pay attention to the feeling of each foot as you stride. Even cleaning your teeth can be done in a mindful way, paying attention to the sensations of taste and coolness.

Perhaps you could try cooking, eating or walking in a mindful way, and see whether, over time, it helps reduce your anxiety?



If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.

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6. Mandle CL, Jacobs SC, Arcari PM, Domar AD. The efficacy of relaxation response interventions with adult patients: a review of the literature. *J Cardiovasc Nurs* 1996 Apr; 10 (3): 4-26.