

ANXIETY DISORDERS

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Anxiety is an anticipation of some impending danger and a feeling that one deal with even the smallest of things – an instinctive mechanism for survival. The essential feature in this disorder is the sense of “free-floating.” As in other anxiety disorders (such as panic attacks and phobia) the dominant symptoms are highly variable, but complaints of continuous feelings of nervousness, trembling, muscular tension, sweating, lightheadedness, palpitations, dizziness and epigastric discomfort are common.

The National Institute for Mental Disorders believes that anxiety is the number one health problem for women. Its course is variable but tends to be fluctuating due to chronic environmental stress. Research has shown that this condition is chronic and can be controlled by administering tranquilizers and painkillers.

Although anxiety is usually thought of as an unpleasant feeling, people do not always try to avoid it. Some people actively seek anxiety and get great pleasure from mastering of dangerous situations e.g. racecar drivers or spectators who experience second hand tension.

Mild anxiety can be quite useful. It helps people deal with the problem situation more efficiently. It provokes you to action and

gears you up to face a threatening situation – it helps you cope. Anxiety is considered abnormal only when it is greater than the usual response to stress in a given culture and a handicap to a person in everyday life. Extreme fear can paralyze us and severe anxiety hinders performance.

Anxiety occurs in many psychiatric problems such as depressive disorders. Most depressed people often imagine other illnesses and may show agitation, trembling and other similar symptoms to the mentioned condition.

In anxiety states, the anxiety may be chronic and sustained but more usually comes and goes. Each episode can last a few minutes to hours. The intensity of nervousness varies from paralyzing terror to mild tension. These episodes can be so uncomfortable that in order to avoid them one may stop carrying out personal and domestic activities of daily living, social interaction or productive work. Basically people suffering from this condition avoid situations they fear would initiate a panic attack occurs.

A person's life becomes increasingly dominated by the precautions they have to take in order to avoid the situation they fear. Sufferers usually know there is no real

danger, they may feel silly about their fear, but they are still unable to control it. People suffering from any anxiety disorder will sometimes not want to ask for help because they think that others might perceive them as "abnormal".

DIAGNOSTIC GUIDELINES

According to the ICD 10, the sufferers must have primary symptoms of anxiety most days for at least several weeks at a time and usually for several months. These symptoms should usually involve elements of:

- Apprehension (worries about future misfortune, feeling "on edge," difficulty in concentrating etc.)
- Motor tension (restless, fidgeting, tension headaches, trembling, inability to relax)
- Autonomic overactivity (lightheadedness, sweating, tachycardia, epigastric discomfort, dizziness, dry mouth, etc)

HELPING PEOPLE WITH ANXIETY

The sufferer will tend to look pale, tense and irritable, and this can cause arguments with those close to them especially if they do not understand what the sufferers feels. Education on this condition is very important for friends and family members so that they can be more understanding and supportive.

Medication

The most common tranquilizers are the valium-like drugs. They are effective at relieving anxiety but they can be addictive after only four weeks of regular use. These drugs should only be used for a short period of time, perhaps to help during a crisis, but not for long term management.

Self Help Groups

These are a good way of getting in touch with people with similar problems. They will both be able to understand what one is going through, and may be able to suggest helpful ways of coping.

Learning to Relax

It can be a great help to learn a special way of relaxing, to help control anxiety and tension. Both the above mentioned types of therapies are usually included in an individualized occupational therapy programme. Relaxation groups and Self-Help groups are usually conducted by an occupational therapist.

Nutrition Therapy:

Most people don't think of consulting a nutritionist to help them, yet eating the right food can have an enormous impact on the mental well being.

Certain foods and drinks such as processed foods, coffee, sugar, tea and alcohol can make you feel more stressed because they are stimulants and will make you feel more anxious. It is also recommended to maintain a healthy diet rich in whole grains, vegetables, fruits, lean meat and fish. Regular meals are a must, in order to maintain a good level of blood sugar, because low blood sugar levels can make one feel anxious and moody.

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND **DURING/AFTER A PANIC ATTACK** **- COPING STRATEGIES**

C- Comfort you. The knowledge that, although they may be painful and frightening, these feelings are perfectly natural. They do not mean that anything more dreadful will happen to you. Once the panic has passed, it is likely to return for a considerable amount of time.

O – Observe what is actually happening to your body, instead of making matters worse by worrying about things that are never going to happen.

P- practice relaxation. It will help you control the physical feelings associated with rising anxiety and may prevent the anxiety entirely.

I - Imagine the pleasant scene that you envisaged at the end of your relaxation session.

N – Notice that when negative thoughts subside the panic quickly diminishes.

G – Go forward again in an easy and relaxed manner.

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