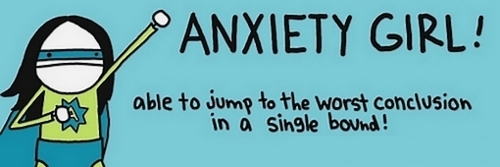
WHAT TO DO ABOUT ANXIETY?

-Prerna Soni, BVCOE



Anxiety and anxiety disorders are not diseases. According to Chamberlain, “One way that I think about anxiety is a simple mathematical equation: Something that we’re afraid of and the level of fear that we have about that is a multiplicative function of our assessment of the probability of the bad thing happening times the severity of the bad thing happening.”

f(level of fear) = assessment of probability x assessment of severity

Chamberlain, a clinical psychologist educated at American University in Washington D.C., is an expert on anxiety and anxiety disorders. Okay, but some anxiety is good for us, right? It makes us study harder for exams, prepare more thoroughly for travel contingencies, prevents us from walking across busy highways, and, in a primeval sense, prepares us to fight or flee when we’re in danger. For instance, it might help you if your arm was trapped under a rock—anxiety and fear of being stuck under that rock forever would tell you to saw off your own arm to save your life.

Disorders happen when the above equation is out of whack, and these things begin to happen:

* The anxiety or fear you feel outweighs the actual danger or realistic probability of what you’re afraid of.
* The anxiety is highly painful and frequent.
* Being anxious interferes with your lifestyle and ability to function normally.

As a proponent of cognitive behavioral therapy, Chamberlain asserted that the most powerful behavioral intervention for anxiety is exposure. In other words, face your fears.  
  
That means that Chamberlain, instead of avoiding public speaking because it makes his heart pound and his hands tremble, never passes up an opportunity to get up in front of people. If you are anxious around people of the opposite sex, talk to them as much as possible, he says. If you hate office parties, go to as many as possible. If you’re afraid of driving, get in your car and gradually get comfortable foot-to-pedal getting to the end of your driveway, to the end of your block, to the supermarket and back.

The solutions to it are simple. Nothing. This tactic can work because anxiety “tends to wax and wane.” Doing nothing about your anxiety can lead to simply avoiding whatever it is that makes you anxious. Avoidance can be debilitating if it affects your lifestyle or ability to function. Exercise, especially the aerobic kind—jogging, swimming, cycling, and walking— is the most effective remedy to anxiety. Meditation is an exercise in focusing your mind on what you want to be thinking about—your breath, a certain mantra, or a certain thought. It can help you learn to tune out the noise of irrational anxiety. Connecting with another person and not being alone with what you’re going through can be helpful. A second party can help you conduct a “reality test” as well, to gauge if you’re making too much of something, worrying too much, and can give alternate perspectives on what’s making you anxious and how probable or severe the consequences might be.

A practitioner sometimes recommends medication to help alleviate the effects of anxiety for some people. Still, on its own, medication is not a viable option as a long term solution. A professional can offer experience and different perspectives on anxiety disorders unlike your family and friends.

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