

ANXIETY

What is Anxiety?

The definition of anxiety is “a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome”. Almost everyone has some form of anxiety, for some people anxiety comes when they are getting ready for a big meeting at work or the first day of school or before they get married, this kind of anxiety is normal and healthy to have.

Anxiety rouses you to action. It gears you up to face a threatening situation. It makes you study harder for that exam, and keeps you on your toes when you're making a speech. In general, it helps you cope.

Depending on how you interpret this feeling, however, it can be your best friend or worst enemy.

People with anxiety disorders get this rush, but deal with it differently. This normally helpful emotion can do just the opposite -- it can keep you from copying, leads to feelings of helplessness and can disrupt your daily life.

What are anxiety disorders?

An anxiety disorder may make you feel anxious most of the time, without any apparent reason. Or the anxious feelings may be so uncomfortable that to avoid them you may stop some everyday activities. Or you may have occasional bouts of anxiety so intense they terrify and immobilize you.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

There are several types of anxiety disorders, each with their own distinct features.

1. Generalized Anxiety Disorder

This disorder is diagnosed when a person has an anxious and worried feeling in a prolonged period of time, at least six months, when he or she is not threatened by any specific danger. It usually focused on specific life circumstances. Several examples for life circumstances are such as keeping their job, simple household matters, well-being of loved ones etc. They do not have a realistic reason to have such intense anxiety and it may persist and interfere with their normal functioning in daily life for a prolonged period of time.

Physical symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder may include sweating, flushing, pounding heart, diarrhea, clammy hands, headaches, muscle tension and muscle aches. Whereas the psychological symptoms frequently include persistent nervousness, fatigue, restlessness, irritability and insomnia.

For instance, when the individual has this disorder, he perhaps will have persistent insomnia, which leads to deprivation of sleep. This will then affect his function ability the next day as he is too tired or fatigue.

2. Panic Disorder

Research shows that panic disorder is an emotional disturbance with usually unexpected and severe panic attacks that may last for only a few minutes to a few hours. As it attacks suddenly, it can occur anytime, even when the individual is asleep.

It is also believed that panic disorder is triggered by stress, fear, or even physical activities. When people discover that by doing this physical activity will cause a panic attack, they tend to avoid the activity completely, causing them to be more sensitive towards the effect of that particular physical activity. Hence, for example, they tend to suffer from panic attacks due to the slightest exertion that will cause their heart rate to increase, in which they will start to perceive a panic attack because of their persistent worry of having this attack again.

3. Phobias

A person suffers from phobia when he suffers from a persistent and irrational fear of a specific object, activity or situation that is excessive and unreasonable given the reality of the threat. This means that that person may show intense fear of something, in which normal people may not have such intense fear of it. This shows that phobias have a distinct meaning of fear. Fear, on the other hand, is a rational reaction to an objectively identified external danger that will cause the person to escape or attack in self-defense. What it means by objectively identified external danger are such as sudden natural disaster or there is fire at one's home. These stimuli are perceived as dangerous and it is rational to have fear against it.

Phobias causes significant distress and it interferes with the adjustment in life of that individual. For example, normal people may have fear against some insects such as bees or even spiders. But these fears did not interfere with their function of living and it did not stop them from achieving their goal. It is only diagnosed as phobia if this fear interferes with the normal functionality of their life.

Specific phobias occur when a patient produces a response towards several different types of objects or situations. Some people may have an intense fear of height, while some towards snakes which may be due to prior conditioning. Different people with specific phobias may have different things or stimuli which they are afraid of.

Phobias can last a lifetime as people tend to avoid the stimulus which they are afraid of. Hence it is very difficult for a phobia to extinguish itself.

4. Social Anxiety Disorder

Social anxiety is brought on by the presence of other people. This further means that that person feels uneasy in a public location because they are afraid of the presence of others around them. People suffering from social anxiety disorder may have stage fright and always fear that they will act something embarrassing in public.

5. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is characterized by uncontrollable, unwanted thoughts and repetitive, ritualized behaviors in which the individual feels compelled to perform.

Obsessions are involuntary, uncontrollable thoughts, images or impulses that tend to occur over and over again in the mind unconsciously. For example, the person may repetitively think that they may not lock the door yet, although they already did. These thoughts are usually disturbing and may cause stress to the person. On the other hand, compulsions are repetitive behaviors or rituals in which the person is driven to carry out again and again. This means that the action is taken again and again to reduce the discomfort of the previously repeating obsessions. For instance, the patient may repetitively check whether he had turned off the oven even though he had checked it again and again for the past few hours. This may then interfere with the normal routine of the individuals daily life especially their social and occupational functioning.

6. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a disorder in which it develops following a traumatic event that threatens one's safety or creates a helpless feeling towards that individual. Traumatic events are such as car crash, kidnapping, natural disasters, rape case, war etc. These events somehow create fear towards the individual in which it develops into PTSD.

The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder usually arise suddenly, gradually or continuously over time. Sometimes it may also be triggered by a stimulus that is related to the traumatic event. For example, victims who had a car accident tend to have PTSD when they see a car.

Techniques to Manage Anxiety

1. Stop and Breathe

The next time your anxiety starts to take you out of the present, regain control by sitting down and taking a few deep breaths. Simply stopping and breathing can help restore a sense of personal balance and bring you back to the present moment.

2. Grounding

Whenever you feel like things are going out of control try grounding yourself. For this follow 5-4-3-2-1. 5 things which you can see. 4 things which touch. 3 things which you can hear. 2 things which you can smell and 1 thing which you can taste/eat. This helps you to bring you to the present moment.

3. Question your thought pattern

How you think affects how you feel. Anxiety can make you overestimate the danger in a situation and underestimate your ability to handle it. Try to think of different interpretations to a situation that's making you anxious, rather than jumping to the worst-case scenario. Look at the facts for and against your thought being true.

4. Go for a walk or do some yoga

Sometimes, the best way to stop anxious thoughts is to walk away from the situation. Taking some time to focus on your body and not your mind may help relieve your anxiety.

5. Maintain a Healthy lifestyle.

Keeping active, eating well, going out into nature, spending time with family and friends, reducing stress and doing the activities you enjoy are all effective in reducing anxiety and improving your wellbeing.

6. Self-Care

It might not seem obvious, but self-care plays a large role in your ability to manage anxiety. When you are getting an adequate amount of sleep, eating healthy meals, being active on a daily basis and avoiding dependence on substances like alcohol and nicotine, you are building up your body and mind's resilience to stress so that you can handle most of the challenges that come your way.

7. Be kind to yourself.

Remember that you are not your anxiety. You are not weak. You are not inferior. Don't pressurize yourself and seek all the necessary help from a professional.

How can you help someone with anxiety

1. Express concern

"If you know someone who is struggling with anxiety, reach out to them and provide support by just listening to what they have to say," "Let them know they can come to you when they feel anxious and that you would like to be there for them,"

2. Know what is not helpful

It is important to understand that continuing to be the one to say "don't worry about that because..." is not actually helping, even if your friend or loved one thinks it is. Don't force on the activities that you think might be helpful for them.

3. Ask them

Don't assume things. Ask the person what they need and act accordingly. Make them feel that you are there for them and their needs.

4. LISTEN non judgmentally

If the person isn't in a crisis, ask how they're feeling and how long they've been feeling that way. If they wonder why you're inquiring, explain that you're concerned and what signs you've noticed, but be sure to be nonjudgmental. Be patient and engaged while they speak. Ask clarifying questions and use minimal prompts – like “I see” – to keep them talking. Pay attention and show that you care.

5. Provide practical help

Offer your loved one practical help with tasks like getting groceries, cleaning or household tasks but be careful not to take over or encourage dependency.

6. Educate yourself

Understanding what helps anxiety takes a bit of time and effort, but it's achievable if you're prepared to take it one step at a time and re-read any info you don't understand straight away. Make yourself aware about what anxiety is so that you don't provide any wrong information or invalid help.