



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Everyone occasionally experiences some anxiety, it's a normal response to a stressful event or perceived threat. Concern for anxiety occurs when a reaction is out of proportion with what might be normally expected in a situation. Mild anxiety is vague and unsettling, while severe anxiety can be extremely debilitating, having a serious impact on daily life.

DO YOU THINK YOU COULD BE SUFFERING FROM ANXIETY?

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

If you suffer from GAD, you may worry about your health, money, family, work, or school, but you can have trouble identifying the specific fear and controlling your worries. Your fear is usually unrealistic or out of proportion with what may be expected in your situation.

Phobia

If you're living with a phobia, you are fearful about particular objects or situations. Phobias are different from GADs because a phobia has a fear response identified with a specific cause. Approximately 9% of people in Australia experience a phobia at some time in their lives.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is an anxiety disorder characterised by thoughts or actions that are repetitive, distressing, and intrusive. If you suffer OCD you will likely know that your compulsions are unreasonable or irrational, but you serve to alleviate your anxiety. OCD affects 2 to 3% of people in Australia at some time in your life.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is anxiety that results from distressing trauma such as military combat, hostage situations or a serious accident. Sufferers are often unable to work.

Symptoms of PTSD include:

- Flashbacks e.g. upsetting intrusive thoughts about a distressing event
- Nightmares and difficulty sleeping
- Loss of interest in activities the person used to find enjoyable
- Feeling on edge/irritable
- Being very alert and easily startled
- Difficulty concentrating

Finding it hard to remember parts of the traumatic event. Approximately 8% of people in Australia are affected by PTSD at some time in their lives.

Panic Disorder

Panic Disorder is a type of anxiety characterised by brief or sudden attacks of intense terror and apprehension that leads to shaking, confusion, dizziness, nausea, and difficulty breathing. Around 3% of the population has a panic disorder.

Social Anxiety Disorder

Social Anxiety Disorder (or social phobia) is a type of social phobia characterised by a fear of being negatively judged by others or a fear of public embarrassment due to impulsive actions.

Symptoms of Social Phobia include:

- Tense muscles
- Trembling
- Churning stomach
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Backache
- Heart palpitations
- Numbness or 'pins and needles' in arms, hands or legs

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ANXIETY IN DAILY LIFE

These are some ideas to help you cope with anxiety on a daily basis:

- Learn to manage stress in your life. Keep an eye on pressures and deadlines and make a commitment to take time out from study or work.
- Learn a variety of relaxation techniques. Physical relaxation methods and meditation techniques really do help.
- Look after your physical self. Eat healthily, get regular exercise and try to keep a regular sleep pattern. Avoid alcohol, cannabis and junk food.
- Learn to replace 'negative self-talk' with 'coping self-talk'. When you catch yourself thinking something negative like 'I can't do this, it's just too hard', try to change it to something more positive, like 'This is hard but I can get through it'.
- Make a list of the negative thoughts you often have and write a list of positive, believable thoughts to replace them.
- Do some research on anxiety disorders this may help you to understand anxiety better and cope with it.
- Keep active; plan, start small and build up slowly. Include other people and don't be too hard on yourself.
 - Pace major life changes
 - Resolve personal conflicts
 - Take part in enjoyable activities
 - Keep work under control

Counselling or therapy can help: talking out problems with a mental health professional can be helpful in treating anxiety disorders. The experience of safety and understanding from a mental health professional can be a positive step on the road to recovery.

Support groups provide an opportunity for people with anxiety disorders to discuss their common problems and find ways of dealing with them. There are also support groups for families and friends of people with anxiety disorders.

Medication is available: this must be decided by a doctor, usually a psychiatrist. Treatment for anxiety with medication, if used, is almost always in conjunction with a counselling or therapeutic process.

References

Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria <http://www.mifellowship.org/sites/default/files/styles/Fact%20Sheets/Understanding%20Anxiety.pdf>, 29 November 2011

Medical News Today <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/info/anxiety>, 29 November 2011

Living With It by Bev Aisbett <http://www.bevaisbett.com/booksdetails.html>, 29 November 2011

Australian Psychological Society <http://www.psychology.org.au>, 29 November 2011

Useful References

Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria www.mifellowship.org

Mental Health Services Website Victoria www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth

Mental Health Council of Australia www.mhca.com.au

SANE Australia www.sane.org

Beyond Blue www.beyondblue.org.au

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