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Heart to Heart

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Anxiety/Panic Attack

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state of heightened feeling of fear, worry or concern. All of us experience fear and anxiety at one time or another. It is normal for anyone to feel anxious, to some degree, about certain things or events. As long as that feeling is proportional to the problem or situation at hand, it is not abnormal.

Why do we have anxiety?

Anxiety is an “alarm system” of our mind, a protective and defense mechanism, that prepares our entire body, alerting us to danger, for “fight or flight.” When a visibly angry person comes towards you with a knife, your heart beats faster, your breathing more intense, your palms and forehead get cold sweats, and your mind races. In this instance, adaptive anxiety is not only normal but is a beneficial and helpful reaction, allowing you to make a split-second decision and a swift response to the danger that lies before you. When one is busy and has a handful, anxiety can provide the will and energy to finish the job or get things done more efficiently. Medical science still does not fully know the causes of anxiety.

What is an Anxiety Attack?

Anxiety Attack is an abnormal and exaggerated degree of worry over trivial incidents or things, or for no reason at all. Here, anxiety is out of control and disproportional, leaving the individual with an overwhelming and incapacitating sense of fear and dread for justifiable reason. This maladaptive anxiety disrupts life, happiness and peace of mind. Panic attacks is a type of anxiety disorder, which is related to some specific trigger object or situation (example: a woman scared of mice may panic when she sees a mouse). Some of the symptoms are similar to those of generalized anxiety plus the following: choking, chest pains, fear of dying, fear of losing control or going crazy, chills and flushes, sweating, shortness of breath, numbness and tingling sensation, feelings of detachment from environment, strangeness and unreality (like being in a dream). They also fear that they might a serious heart or lung disease or a brain tumor, and go to the Emergency Room or to their physician for urgent care.

What is a phobia?

Phobia is an abnormal and extreme fear and anxiety as a reaction to specific situation, event or objects. Example: fear of bridges, snakes, crowds, heights, spiders, open places or fear of social gatherings. All of us have a certain degree of normal phobias. It becomes a problem only if it disrupts normal life. Post-traumatic disorder follows a severely traumatic physical or emotional experience. Example: serving in the military during an active war, assault or rape, surviving a plane crash, torture or tornado, or a car serious accident. These individuals relive the traumatic events thru flashbacks, memories or dreams.

How does one handle anxiety?

- 1. Take control of your worry by picking a place a specific time period to do your worrying. Spend a few minutes analyzing your concerns and think of what you can do about them, and not dwell on what might happen, but on what is happening and of the rational way to resolve them.**
- 2. Learn how to relax, listening to soft music, doing yoga, meditation, biofeedback, deep breathing, dancing and enjoying time with friends and/or family members, etc.**
- 3. Exercise regularly to decrease your anxiety.**
- 4. Try to sleep at least 8 hours a day.**
- 5. Confront the things that have made you anxious before, in order to get used to handling them and be more comfortable doing it.**
- 6. Stay away from cigarettes, alcohol or drugs**
- 7. Avoid coffee, soft drinks with caffeine (colas), tea and chocolate, since all of these tend to increase anxiety.**
- 8. Consult with your physician. Most of these conditions respond well to proper medical care, which might include simple advice and reassurance, psychotherapy and/or medications.**

Recognizing and accepting the fact that there is a medical problem and taking action to resolve it promptly is the first step towards healing. Modern medicine has so much to offer today, thanks to the mind-boggling, cutting-edge technology in health and sciences.

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