

# Understanding Anxiety

Prepared by Michael Orr, LMSW for Arizona State Hospital Family Support Group

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Anxiety helps us get away from harmful situations, prepare for important events and gears us up to take action. But sometimes it can become a problem when:

- \*It is persistent, or seems uncontrollable and overwhelming.
- \*It becomes an excessive, irrational dread of everyday situations.
- \*It interferes with daily activities.

If this happens- you might be experiencing an anxiety disorder.

Some examples of "pretty ordinary " anxiety might include:

- \*Worrying about paying bills, getting a job, romantic or family difficulties.
- \* Being nervous or sweating before making a presentation, performing on stage or another significant event.
- \* Wanting to be healthy and live in a safe home and area.
- \*Anxiety after experiencing sadness or trouble sleeping after some traumatic event.

However- an anxiety disorder might involve:

- \*Constant, unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with your daily life.
- \*Panic attacks that "seem to come out of nowhere" and lead to the fear of having another similar attack.
- \*Performing repetitive , uncontrollable actions like checking things over and over, cleaning over and over, or rearranging things- especially if it interferes with living your life.
- \*Recurring nightmares, flashbacks, or emotional numbness several months or even years after the traumatic event.

Some common anxiety disorders are:

\*Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

\*Panic Disorder (Panic attacks) sometimes with agoraphobia

\*Social Anxiety Disorder

Closely related are:

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Some general facts:

\*Anxiety Disorders are the most common psychiatric illness among children and adults.

\*It is estimated that over 40 million American Adults experience some Anxiety Disorder, only about 1/3 seek/ receive treatment.

\* Anxiety Disorders are generally very treatable.

\*These disorders can cause life to "spiral out of control" and cause increasing problems in everyday life.

### **Some Specific Anxiety Disorder Information.**

Generalized Anxiety Disorder:

\*Exaggerated worry and tension, "expecting the worst", even when there is no cause for significant concern.

\*Anticipating disaster about money, health, family and relationships , work or other things.

\* Excessive worry about several everyday problems, for at least 6 months.

\* Just the thought of getting through the day can cause anxiety.

\*People can't stop "the worry cycle" even if they realize that they are probably too upset about the situation.

\*GAD affects about about 6.8 million people per year, women are about twice as likely to be affected.

\* People with this disorder to a mild degree can function socially and in a job, but may avoid some situations because of the disorder, and when anxiety is more severe can have difficulty with tasks which seem like "simple everyday situations".

### Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia:

- The experience of what appears to be "an out of the blue" panic or overwhelming anxiety or panic- with the fear that this might occur again.
- Can occur at any time- even in sleep.
- People may be afraid to tell anyone, fearing they will be considered a hypochondriac, or be told "you just worry too much" or "you blow everything out of proportion".
- Often occurs with another mental or physical disorder, such as: other anxiety disorders; depression; irritable bowel syndrome, asthma or substance abuse. This can complicate accurate diagnosis.
- About 6 million adults experience this disorder in any given year- more common in women than men, and typically begins in early adulthood.

About 1/3 of all adults with Panic Disorder also experience AGORAPHOBIA. When this happens, people can become afraid to return to a place or situation in which they had a panic attack (Shopping mall, bus, sports arena etc. ) When this happens their world can become gradually smaller, it may become very threatening for them to deviate from a very fixed route or area.

### Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

\*Unwanted , intrusive thoughts – that people cant seem to get out of their heads (Obsessions) that can lead to repeatedly performing ritualistic, repetitive behaviors (Compulsions) to relieve anxiety.

\*A powerful need to engage in the obsessions and/or compulsions, even if a person is aware that the situation is irrational.

\* People might spend hours at a time performing compulsive acts (such as washing their hands, checking things over and over again, counting things) to ward off persistent thoughts or fears.

\*This can interfere with various aspects of life: work; schoolwork, family, social well-being- and it can interfere with all aspects of life if left untreated.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- A serious condition which can occur in people who have experienced or observed a very traumatic experience (natural disaster, serious accident, terrorist situation, war, or violent personal assault, such as rape).

- Most people who survive such traumatic events recover from them, but people with PTSD continue to have anxiety and /or depression even months or years after the experience.
- Symptoms include: flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive memories and “hyper vigilance” when something reminds them of the original situation.
- Women are twice as likely to have PTSD as are men, children can also develop PTSD.
- PTSD often occurs with: substance abuse, depression or other anxiety disorders.
- People with PTSD often have difficulty in many aspects of life- especially in close family relationships, or friendships.
- People who have experienced previous traumatic events are more likely to experience PTSD.
- 7.7 million American adults have PTSD.

### **Tips to Manage Anxiety and Stress**

Note: Anxiety Disorders can take a toll on physical health! By taking steps to manage anxiety, you are also taking care of your physical health.

- **TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH-** including getting enough sleep, follow good nutrition practices, and exercise regularly.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine- they can aggravate anxiety and trigger panic attacks.
- Take deep breaths- inhaling and exhaling slowly.
- Count to 10 (or even 20) and repeat.
- Do your best- but **DON'T** trip yourself up trying to be perfect!
- Accept that you can't control everything- try to put your situation into perspective.
- **HUMOR!** Watch a funny movie, spend time with friends who make you laugh, look for the humor even in ludicrous situations.
- Practice gratitude- maintain a positive attitude as much as you can.
- Get involved with a hobby, volunteer- find what you enjoy and do it!
- If you are so inclined and have religious or spiritual beliefs – tap into these- in a healthy way.
- Talk to someone you trust- someone who is not judgemental and whose opinion you respect
- If the anxiety and stress seem out of control – **TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR OR A THERAPIST.** In some cases a trusted and informed clergy person or reputable spiritual advisor may be able to help.

All of the above material is adapted from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America ( ADAA) website- with some additional comments.

### **EFFECTIVE TREATMENTS FOR ANXIETY DISORDERS**

Licensed psychologists, therapists, or Clinical Social Workers can diagnose and treat people with anxiety disorders, using research based treatment, through a variety of psychotherapies. Cognitive and Behavior Therapies appear to be most effective in dealing with anxiety disorders.

- Behavioral therapy- techniques to reduce or stop undesired behaviors related to anxiety disorders.
- Cognitive therapy- learning how thoughts lead to symptoms of anxiety disorders- and how to change those thought patterns. This can be combined with behavioral therapy techniques.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy- combining the 2 approaches listed above.
- Medication may be helpful in conjunction with therapy. It is important to discuss the side effects of medications with your doctor- watch out for the side effects and have medication monitored regularly.

Most people who seek professional help for anxiety disorders can reduce or eliminate their symptoms and return to a healthy level of coping with life. Make sure you are comfortable with the therapist/ professional, and cooperate in treatment.

Above information excerpted from American Psychological Association (APA ) website.

**It's a beautiful but tough world out there! We all need to take care of ourselves and each other.**

**( Mike)**

For more information:

[www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety](http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety)

[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

Addendum to Anxiety presentation: Updated information from DSM 5

1. Social Phobia is now named: Social Anxiety Disorder- but is still listed under Anxiety Disorder category.
2. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is now listed under a new category: Obsessive Compulsive and Related Disorders.
3. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is now listed under a new category: Trauma and Stressor Related Disorders.