

Coping with Anxiety

An anxious heart weighs a man down

Anxiety can have a major impact on a person's functioning. It can influence a person physiologically, cognitively and emotionally. There are various symptoms that anxiety sufferers experience. The causes of anxiety are complex. Just by moving not enough, you can get mentally stressed. You can get anxiety because of poor sleep. Anxiety can also be caused by nutritional deficiencies, excess caffeine, medications, and numerous other risk factors.

Hormonal imbalances may cause anxiety. The term "hormonal imbalance" has a variety of meanings, but it's also clear that it can lead to anxiety in some people.

1. Symptoms of Anxiety:

1.1 Physiological symptoms of anxiety sufferers are as follows:

- They feel weak.
- They experience rapid, pounding heartbeat or palpitations.
- They feel tightness around their chest.
- They feel as if they cannot get enough air.
- They feel periodically dizzy.
- They often sweat.
- They experience muscle tension, aches, or tremors.
- They feel chronically tired.
- Their mouths feel dry.
- They may experience blurred vision.

1.2 Cognitive symptoms of anxiety sufferers:

- They think that they cannot carry on.

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- They think they should escape from places and situations.
- They think that they are going to make a fool of themselves.
- They think that people are looking at them.
- They think that they are going to have a heart attack.
- They often think that they are going to faint.
- They think they are going crazy.
- They think that they cannot survive on their own.
- They think no one will help them.
- They think they cannot go out because they will lose control.
- They re-play social events and conversations.

1.3 Emotional Symptoms that anxiety sufferers often have:

- They are full of fears that they find it difficult to focus on something else.
- They feel like something terrible is going to happen.
- They worry excessively.
- They feel uneasy and alone a lot of the time.
- They often feel isolated, lonely, down in the dumps and depressed.
- They feel they have no control over what happens to them.
- They feel embarrassed, rejected and criticized.
- They often feel like screaming with anger.
- They often feel confused and cannot remember things.
- Things sometimes feel unreal to them.
- They often detached themselves from difficult situations.

2. Causes and contributing factors

2.1 General causes

- Stressful childhood.
- Trauma – abuse, divorce, accidents, domestic violence ..

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- Alcohol or benzodiazepine dependence. Intoxication from stimulants is likely to be associated with repetitive panic attacks.
- Chronic exposure to organic solvents in the work environment can be associated with anxiety disorders. Painting, varnishing and carpet laying are some of the jobs in which significant exposure to organic solvents may occur.
- Bad eating habits.
- Bad sleeping habits.
- Chemical imbalance.
- Unhealthy thought patterns.

2.2 Hormones and Anxiety

The key thing to understand about hormones is that they are the messengers responsible for nearly every process in the body, and your body gets used to specific amounts of each hormone. Various hormonal changes can create anxiety, for example: Pregnancy, Menstrual Cycle/Birth Control Pills, Thyroid Health Issues, Nutritional Deficiencies, Puberty/Adolescence and General Stress

Anxiety is complex enough that it's even possible for stress and anxiety to cause hormonal imbalances that lead to further stress and anxiety. Hormonal imbalances are an issue that can be physical, psychological, or both, and no matter what causes it can lead to anxiety.

Types of Hormonal Imbalances and Anxiety

A few examples of hormonal imbalances include:

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- **Menstruation** is unfairly blamed and stereotyped for a variety of emotional and psychological issues, but many studies have confirmed that menstruation (and its effects on estrogen and progesterone) can either contribute to anxiety or exacerbate anxiety.
- **Adrenaline** is released by stress, so in general, excess adrenaline is a symptom of anxiety, not an imbalance in and of itself. But in some cases, stress can essentially damage the body's adrenaline symptom so that it fires adrenaline without warning, and that adrenaline will almost assuredly create a feeling of unease or anxiety.
- **Pregnancy** can lead to a host of personality changes, and anxiety is chief among them - especially combined with the stress of pregnancy itself.
- **Thyroid** health issues are usually due to either nutrition or hypo/hyperthyroidism, so a doctor will generally need to diagnose and recommend proper treatment, but issues like hyperthyroidism can lead to an overproduction of various hormones that may lead to not only anxiety, but also severe anxiety attacks.

3. Reasons why we sometimes overreact

Anxiety is often not dealt with at the time it appears, but repressed into the subconscious mind instead. When we encounter current situations and experiences that cause anxiety, anxiety from their previous traumatic experiences is also aroused. In most cases it is the emotion from previous traumatic experiences which is aroused – the specific event is usually not recalled. This explains why we often overreact to current day situations.

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A panic attack is a 'fight or flight' response to a perceived threat. The reason the human brain responds like this goes back to our prehistoric past when humans needed their bodies to respond quickly to a perceived physical threat. Our mental activity during a panic attack suddenly moves to the mid brain, resulting in the heightened state of fear and panic. In short, a separate part of our brain becomes more active during a panic attack.

Our brain is the control centre and that is where the change needs to happen. During a panic attack our brain has moved into panic mode and in order to really restore order, we need to learn how to switch our mental activity back to the rational part of your brain. We need to learn skills that will allow us to do so in a split second, regardless of where we are or what we are doing.

4. Tips for anxiety sufferers

- Go for tests – hormones, deficiencies and any physical problems that can cause anxiety.
- Good time management.
- Make a priority list and daily activities lists.
- Meditation and relaxation.
- Essential oils, the extract from plants, have been used for thousands of years to treat a number of conditions, including anxiety. Essential oils activate certain areas of your brain and release feel-good chemicals such as serotonin. They have been found to ease symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression, improve mood, and improve sleep. Lavender, Cedarwood, Bergamot, Chamomile, Frankincense and Vetiver are good to ease anxiety.
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Reflect on micro moments of happiness.
- Work through trauma.
- Stay in the moment.

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- We need to accept that we will sometimes feel anxious.
- We need to be strict with ourselves when we start to feel anxious by saying: “Stop, I will not allow myself to go into a panic.”
- We need to learn to say things towards ourselves that can calm ourselves down e.g. “I can do this, it will be okay”.
- Live one day at a time.
- Focus on positive thoughts.
- Get out of the worry habit by limiting the amount of time spent each day in worrying. Choose a designated time period and time for worrying.
- Do not procrastinate tasks.
- Use supplements and herbs such as Vit B, Omega 3, Magnesium and Ashvaganda.
- Exercise at least 20 minutes a day.
- Improve sleep hygiene.
- Do what you can to deal with the fear or problem causing the anxiety. Examine different alternatives or possible solutions and try one.
- Challenge your mistaken beliefs.
- Make time to relax.
- Increase your intake of vegetables and fruits.
- Eat foods that provide your entire mineral and vitamin needs naturally.
- Increase your intake of dietary fibre.
- Drink water.
- Explore your self-talk and turn it around.
- Drop the “What ifs” in your life. Change your attitude to “So what?” or “It is what it is”.
- Don’t be demoralized by helplessness. Knowledge is the key to overcoming feelings of helplessness.
- Don’t stay in a defeated state.
- Be compassionate toward yourself. Do not be your own enemy.
- Do not let your problem dominate your life and give it a second position.

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- Beware of the pitfalls of self-pity. Instead of saying “Why me?” say “What can I do about it?”
- No alcohol and drugs

5. Tips to handle a panic attack

- Controlling panic attacks starts with not fearing a panic attack.
- Do not fight your feelings of panic, acknowledge your feelings.
- Use Tapping exercises
- Say to yourself: I am just going to wait until these feelings have passed, then I will be in control again.
- Get a cold shower or hold something cold. Focus on the coldness.
- Give your panic a wide berth and allow it to pass. You can only try to control your breathing. Wait it out. Let it pass. The attack will pass more quickly if you don't react with more fear.
- Keep reminding yourself that the attack is only a temporary interruption.

(Information was obtained from - *The Anxiety Cure* by Dr A.D. Hart)

6. Affirmations

- My anxiety is not going to last.
- I will not worry about things that don't really matter.
- I will deal with problems as they arise.
- I am in control.