

ANXIETY

Definition

Anxiety is a feeling of uneasiness, apprehension, or tension you feel in response to stressful or threatening circumstances. Some people feel more anxiety than others.

Cause

Anxiety can either be mild or so intense that you feel panic. Normal anxiety is temporary, but when it lasts a long time or occurs in the absence of a stress or threat, it is considered an illness.

When anxiety is so extreme that a person is in a panic state, then the anxiety is a psychiatric disorder known as a panic disorder.

Anxiety can be brought on by certain drugs, including:

- Alcohol
- Cocaine
- Caffeine
- Certain sedatives
- Amphetamines
- Other drugs that affect the nervous system

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of anxiety can be classified into 2 categories, psychological and physical.

Psychological signs and symptoms include:

- Apprehension
- Irritability
- Panic
- Impatience
- Feeling of imminent danger
- Restlessness
- Fear
- Inability to relax
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Lack of enjoyment

Physical signs and symptoms include:

- Dry mouth
- Flushing

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- Nausea, vomiting
- Faintness
- Lightheadedness
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Muscle tension
- Frequent urination
- Hyperactivity
- Sexual difficulties
- Tremors
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Hyperventilation
- Sweating, especially in the palms
- Shortness of breath
- Tingling
- Choking sensation

Diagnosis

Anxiety is diagnosed by interview. Your doctor will try to identify symptoms associated with anxiety. He or she will ask you about life events, daily activities, and your view of how things are going.

In addition the doctor will examine you. Tests may be done to rule out the possibility of a physical problem as the underlying reason for your anxiety. Possible tests include a complete blood count, blood analysis, thyroid function tests, and urine analysis.

Treatment

You and your doctor will discuss your symptoms. Then he or she will try to suggest ways to help you deal with anxiety. The doctor will also try to identify circumstances that trigger anxiety. The doctor may refer you to a psychotherapist, a specialist who can help you learn how to deal with anxiety.

If your doctor suspects your anxiety may be caused by drugs or physical problems he or she will give you a physical examination and do some tests. The doctor will then recommend treatment.

If your anxiety is severe or causing panic, your doctor may prescribe a drug to help you cope with the symptoms initially. These drugs are most effective when used in combination with psychotherapy and stress management techniques.

To decrease anxiety, it is important to identify and use methods that relieve the symptoms. Your doctor may want to see you regularly if your anxiety attacks include physical signs and symptoms.

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Self-help

Increase your awareness of how anxiety and stress affect you and learn which coping methods work for you. Also get enough rest, follow a balanced diet, exercise and learn to use relaxation techniques. Talk with your doctor about managing events in your life that trigger anxiety. In addition learn to talk with friends and co-workers about the normal stresses of daily life.

Prevention

Anxiety may occur when life's demands are greater than your ability to cope with them. Therefore, prevention means improving your coping skills or modifying the demands and expectations in your life. To prevent anxiety, try these techniques:

- Relaxation techniques such as self-hypnosis and meditation
- Behavioural techniques aimed at improving ways of coping (exercising, getting adequate rest)
- Counselling such as marital counselling, parent effectiveness training and job or career counselling aimed at changing stressful life circumstances.
- Broadening and deepening positive relationships by finding group activities that encourage give and take and provide a feeling of support.

Mild anxiety can be useful; research has shown that encouraging mild anxiety in the classroom enhances learning. However, anxiety can be harmful because it puts your body and mind in a constant state of excitement, which changes some body functions such as heart rate. Allowing anxiety to continue or to become your main focus does not resolve the events in life that cause the anxiety.

Knowing how to lessen anxiety can build emotional strength to cope with life events that cause anxiety. To minimize negative stress that can cause anxiety:

- Exercise for 20 minutes, at least 3 times a week
- Change your drinking eating and sleeping habits. Rest or sleep 6 to 10 hours a day, drink less coffee and alcohol.
- Find improved ways to cope with stress;
Change or eliminate what causes your stress
Develop methods of relaxation like talking with positive-minded people
Listening to music, sewing, playing cards, walking or enjoying hobbies.
Learn to use stress management techniques like muscle relaxation exercises, mental imagery and diaphragmatic breathing.
Use positive thoughts to overcome negative ones, such as telling yourself, "I am doing a good job"
Develop and maintain an attitude that things will work out
Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle
Seek professional help for dealing with life events that produce stress and for developing positive ways of coping.

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Patient Information Sheet

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