

ANXIETY

You are anxious when you feel that something unpleasant is going to happen in the future. Sometimes there can be a good reason for the feeling, but often it is imagined, or exaggerated.

If anxiety continues for a long time, it can seriously hamper daily living leading to more anxiety. Anxiety makes a person vulnerable to physical and mental illnesses.

Anxiety shows in symptoms like these:

- Dizziness, Breathlessness
- Inability to concentrate, Nausea
- Peculiar feeling in the stomach, Sweating a lot
- Shaking, Trembling
- Insomnia, Muscle tension
- Numbness or tingling in limbs, Need to urinate more
- Pounding of the heart, Vague apprehension
- Irritability Forgetfulness, Intolerance to noise

Anxiety may be associated with other mental symptoms like depression, obsessions or certain other serious mental symptoms.

Some of the things that people feel anxious about are:

- Financial problems, Legal problems
- Health, Children and family
- Job promotion, Exams
- Choosing a career, Relationships

Sometimes anxiety and restlessness might mean that there is a physical illness present for which a person may need to be examined.

Here are some things that could help with anxiety -

- Anxiety signals a need to think of the way you are living your life, and the problems you have. Work out a plan of action for each of your major problems and take positive action instead of worrying.
- Learn Yoga, relaxation, or meditation. The beneficial effects of these are well established. Breathing exercises are especially helpful. Biofeedback and electro sleep are techniques of relaxation through machines.
- Keep a careful record of the situations that make you anxious. This may help you to work out what you can do

In each situation, to lessen the anxiety.

- Take time to give yourself physical relaxation - go swimming, or take up your favourite sport. Take holidays when possible. Start on your hobbies. Spend quality time with children.
- Eat well balanced diet with plenty of green vegetables and fruits.

You should consult the psychiatrist/psychologist when you find...

- that your anxiety is seriously affecting your daily life.
- you can't control your anxiety through your own efforts.
- you have so many of the symptoms of anxiety that you are always worried about the state of your health.
- that in addition to anxiety, you are always falling sick.

What the psychiatrist/psychologist can do?

The psychiatrist/psychologist would check the reason and intensity of anxiety. They may carry out certain psychological tests of personality, interpersonal relationships etc., to see if any life situation could be causing anxiety.

The psychiatrist may use medication, psychotherapy or counseling, special methods like relaxation therapy, machine assisted relaxation, autogenic training, or biofeedback, to treat the anxiety.

Warning:

Never take medication for anxiety without the psychiatrist's advice. Do not use alcohol or drugs for anxiety.

DEPRESSION

DO YOU FEEL UNUSUALLY DEPRESSED?

Experiences of depression or sadness are a part of everyday life. If however, they have gone on for unusually long or are especially severe, look for these signs -

Withdrawal from social activities, crying frequently, suicidal thoughts, waking up too early in the mornings, disturbed sleep, poor appetite, feelings of worthlessness, general tiredness, restlessness, lack of interest, blaming self for problems, preoccupied with guilt or health, low energy, slowed mental functions, reduced emotional response. In addition, suicide is a very real possibility in depression. So, one should be alert for any signs of suicidal thoughts or intentions.

The person may give direct hints of wanting to die, or may be seen to be making preparations - making a will, giving away belongings, collecting sleeping pills etc. Guilt and self blame, feeling of worthlessness and emptiness are more common in those attempting suicide. Suicide is especially common when an alcoholic or drug addict has to deal with a broken relationship. Suicide is more likely in those who have tried it before, specially if precautions were taken to try and avoid discovery and if violent means were used - e.g., fire. Suicide is more common when someone close to the person has died, specially a person losing his or her spouse, mother losing her only son. Old age, unemployment and physical illness make suicide more likely. When a dependent person loses his or her support suicide is more likely.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If you should notice some of the signs mentioned above, and if you find that feelings of depression and loss of mental and physical energy are taking over so that daily life is disrupted, consult a psychiatrist. If the person seems to give up responsibility for him and is barely able to care for his own basic needs, and if any ideas of suicide are expressed or suspected, seeking help must be immediate.

What causes depression?

TREATMENT OF DEPRESSION

Few people realize that depression is treatable. The psychiatrist or psychologist can help the depressed person in the following ways:

Psychological testing -The psychologist can carry out several tests, among them tests of personality, tests for the detection of psychological problems, tests for determining interests and aptitudes and tests of intelligence level. These can be very valuable in planning the person's treatment.

Medication is often used in severe cases of depression, particularly when the depression is of the type caused by physical factors. It is useful in even mild or moderate cases to improve depression so that changes in life style can take place but must always be used under the supervision of a Psychiatrist

Hospitalization is necessary in cases of severe depression, specially when there is a threat of suicide. Electroconvulsive therapy may be required in severely depressed suicidal cases.

Psychotherapy involves working through the person's problems and allowing him to express and come to terms with his feelings. A reassessment of the person's life situation takes place and the person is helped to

overcome blocks that prevent him living a more fulfilling life. *The result of self help with treatment always makes the outcome better as it leads to personal growth apart from being therapeutic.*

DO YOU CONSTANTLY FEEL UNDER STRESS?

About Stress

Stress is the physical and emotional response necessary for dealing with situations that are frightening, confusing, exciting, or tiring. But if there is too much stress, it can trigger off many diseases and disorders - insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, asthma, and migraine are just a few. What can make long term stress so damaging, is the fact that it produces tension. It is like the body being in constant preparation to meet a challenge.

How to recognize stress within you

If you are currently facing a crisis, or a situation in which you are un-relaxed, look out for these signs of stress:-

BODY CHANGES	FEELINGS	BEHAVIOR
sweating	fear	avoidance
shaking	anger	criticism
high blood pressure	depression	denial
racing heart	restlessness	escape
dry mouth	irritability	violence
choking sensation	insecurity	
churning stomach	confusion	

Stress can trigger off other problems - insomnia, difficulty in concentrating, and symptoms of mental or physical illnesses that you may be prone to. It is known that those under stress are more prone to all physical illnesses including infections, and stress causes illness like peptic ulcer, heart disease, high blood pressure, etc. Stress can trigger off any of the major physical illnesses, and some of the minor mental illnesses are also caused by stress.

When to see the psychiatrist

If you feel:

- that stress is creating so much tension in you that it interferes with your effective handling of situation
- there is a feeling of stress for a long period of time
- the symptoms of stress are too acute for you to cope with
- you are developing physical illnesses very fast or have
- started developing minor mental symptoms listed above.

How can the psychiatrist or psychologist help:

For those who cannot develop their own coping methods to deal with stress, the mental health professional may work out a **behavior therapy** programme in which the person can be trained in coping skills. This will first involve **psychological testing** so that a training programme suited to individual needs can be planned. Relaxation and stress are two sides of the same coin. Relaxation is the key to coping with stress. The psychiatrist or psychologist can train you in special **breathing exercises** to bring about quick relaxation for dealing with situations that make you feel stressed, **progressive muscular relaxation** which involves training the brain to distinguish between relaxed and tensed muscles in the body and control them, **machine assisted relaxation** methods, such as biofeedback, and electrosleep, to teach control over body tension. Counseling will be of help in working through problems for people who have a constant stress factor in their lives. **Medication** for a short time may be required to bring down the extreme levels of stress so that other techniques may be applied.

What can you do to deal with stress?

1. Examine aspects of life and try to identify sources of stress.
2. See what you can do to change these situations or how you can by-pass the source of stress.

3. Think of the skills you need to deal with situations, and practice them. In this way, you will increase your personal resources and not find situations so stressful.
4. Learn methods of relaxation - frequent holidays, doing things you enjoy, favorite sports and hobbies, Yoga, meditation or music.

Never take alcohol/tobacco for stress or medication without the strict supervision of a psychiatrist. These can create a serious and damaging dependency.

PANIC ATTACKS

DO YOU SUFFER FROM ATTACKS OF PANIC?

Some people feel more anxious than others. They almost seem to look for things to worry about. Minor things bother them and they constantly seek reassurance and support from those around them.

Sometimes, people with a high level of anxiety, have what appears to be attacks of pure panic. During such attacks, they feel that something terrible is going to happen, or that they are about to die.

Most of all, there are physical symptoms that become prominent.

These are:

- feeling that one cannot breathe properly
- racing heart
- trembling
- sweating
- tingling sensations
- hot flushes
- nausea
- chest pain
- need to urinate
- cold, clammy hands

These attacks can come on suddenly and can subside in a few minutes. In some people these can be so intense and uncomfortable that the person lives in fear of panic! More usually, the person feels certain that the reason for the attack is some physical illness, like a heart disease. People who have such attacks begin to avoid many situations that they feel may bring it on.

Why do people have panic attacks?

It is usually difficult for the family members of a person affected with panic disorder to understand why there should be such an inappropriately strong reaction to something minor. It is easy to lose patience with someone under the circumstances. The reason for someone developing this disorder are to be found in the person's life experiences and personality, because of which, a wrong way of coping with stress has come about. Sometimes, there is some event in the past that has frightened the person or made him or her anxious. After this, even the idea of the situation taking place again, makes the person anxious. To make matters more complicated, the person begins to feel anxious about feeling anxious! Sometimes physical illness likes —

Mitral Valve Prolapse Syndrome or Hyperthyroidism may present similarly but careful checking can distinguish between these.

When to seek help

- If the attacks are affecting daily routine
- If the person feels the need to have a constant companion for comfort.
- If the person cannot be in certain situations that are a must or are a source of livelihood
- If the symptoms have started causing social withdrawal or depression
- If the episodes make a person fear for his/her life and all the physical tests and investigations are normal

Treatment of panic attacks

The disorder of panic attacks is treatable. It is usually a learned response to stress, and it can be 'un-learned'. The psychiatrist or psychologist treating the problem will work out a programme of behavior change during which the person will be exposed to the panic producing situations. He or she will be helped to face the situation with relaxation techniques. Biofeedback can also be very helpful in reduction of anxiety. This is a machine assisted technique for relaxation but as it gives a feedback to the person about his ability to relax, it makes his/her feel in control.

In most cases, a course of medication is used to control the symptoms. The medication controls the panic attacks and generalized anxiety and does not allow the episode to progress. It also reduces the intensity of symptoms allowing the psychological help to show better results. The mental health specialist will also guide the family on how to handle the attacks. The support of the family helps a person to deviate the thoughts, from an anxious situation and feel mastery over the situation.

It is best to treat the problem at the earliest as the anxiety keeps becoming generalized over a period of time leading to avoidance of situations. The most important factor is for the person to feel in control and to feel mastery over the situation. It has to be a continuous process and slowly, self confidence comes back and panic attacks disappear.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

ARE YOU OR ANYONE IN YOUR FAMILY TROUBLED BY REPEATED, UNWANTED THOUGHTS OR THE URGE TO REPEAT CERTAIN ACTS?

The Problem:

Are there complaints of unwanted thoughts that keep coming back even though one tries to stop them? Is there, for example, the thought that the lights in the house could still be on, when they have been checked several times before leaving the house?

Are there repeated acts - acts that everyone feels are unnecessary. For example, washing the hands repeatedly because there is the feeling that there are germs on them? Are there 'doubts' and superstitions about things happening in day to day life?

These unwanted and repeated thoughts are called **Obsessions** and the urge to repeat certain acts is called a **Compulsion**. Everyone has them now and then. But, if these begin to interfere with daily living so that each day seems to be a struggle, it may be because of a disorder known as **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**, which requires treatment.

The Signs:

In addition, the person may show...

- over concern with cleanliness
- over concern with routine
- lessened interest in social activities
- uncertainty about own judgments
- a tendency to get too upset about minor things
- over concern with detail
- a tendency to be easily tired

Of course, anyone could have some of these traits, without having an obsessive compulsive disorder.

The Causes:

Sometimes it must be difficult to understand why these symptoms simply just can't be controlled. It is important to understand that these problems are not the person's own fault. Something in the biological make up, certain physical factors that are unseen but that a person is born with can cause the tendency to develop an obsessive compulsive disorder. The environment, life experiences, and of course, stress, also contributes to the problem.

People do not cause this disease - not the sufferer himself, nor his family members. However, certain beliefs, certain reactions, can have a contributing effect.

When to seek help:

It would be best to consult the psychiatrist if you find that...

- there are complaints or signs of having repeated, unwanted thoughts which interfere with daily functioning
- there are repeated acts that everyone feels are unnecessary and great anxiety if an attempt is made to stop these actions
- day to day activities take a long time, because they have become complicated with rituals and patterns of behavior
- there are constant doubts about simple events

Treatment of OCD:

Many people think of OCD, not as a mental disorder, but as a sort of superstition. This is not so. No superstition by itself can disrupt daily functioning to the extent that OCD does. Symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder sometimes become more; sometimes less, and sometimes they go away altogether on their own. Usually, they come up or become intensified if the person is under some stress. This problem is difficult for the sufferer or the family members have to handle alone because of the intense anxiety it causes the person to try and stop the obsessions and compulsions.

What the mental health specialist (psychiatrist or psychologist) can do to help with the problem —

Medication - When the problem is acute, the psychiatrist may consider starting a course of medicines to control the anxiety or depression or lessen the illness. These drugs must however always be taken or continued under the psychiatrist's supervision. Sometimes there is depression along with the other OCD symptoms, and this may have to be treated as well.

Behavior Therapy - The most successful therapy with obsessive compulsive disorder, this involves starting a programme of training the person in 'thought stopping' methods and combining relaxation methods to lessen anxiety while preventing the repeating patterns of behavior that trouble the person.

Family Therapy - Along with other measures, the psychiatrist will counsel the family, teaching them to support the person with getting rid of the problem. He will also help in improving family interaction. The family, the psychiatrist, and the person suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder, can then work as a team. In addition, the psychiatrist will provide guidelines to the family on how to cope with the problem.

Some Words of Advice:

What most family members of a person affected with OCD do is to co-operate with the person's wishes to keep the peace. When the rituals and patterns carry on day after day, it becomes easier to give in than to resist and try to talk the person out of it. This only makes the symptoms worse. On the other hand, ignoring the problem or pretending it doesn't exist is not going to help either. Families should get help and begin a programme for changing the person's behavior. The home environment should be supportive and reassuring. The earlier the disorder is treated, more the chances of success.

MOOD DISORDER

DO YOU, OR ANYONE IN THE FAMILY, SUFFER FROM MOOD SWINGS?

Everyone has ups and downs in mood. Sometimes you may bubble with energy and good spirits, with everything being a lot of fun and healthy positive outlook on life. Other times you feel 'off mood', when things are not particularly enjoyable and everything seems to be going wrong. Changes in mood are so much a part of life that we sometimes fail to recognize when they are abnormal.

Signs of abnormal mood swings :

If these signs of excitement are present, they may indicate an abnormal mood swing on the upward side - (Mania)

- feeling high, everything seems wonderful
- fast flow of ideas
- talks too much, too loud and never sticks
- seems not to need sleep
- to one topic, distracted easily
- highly energetic and active
- impatient
- interfering
- insensitive to other people
- easily irritated
- sudden increase in religious feeling
- feeling one is great or special
- not understanding that he or she chosen is behaving differently
- lack of self criticism
- spending lots of money, energetic, never still

These signs can become more and more intense with the person's high energy turning into violence and destructive behavior, or they can remain low key, with the person seeming to be in a heightened mood all the time. These signs could be symptoms of a disorder known as manic depressive psychosis (MDP). These 'manic' symptoms can sometimes disappear suddenly, giving way to normal behavior or there can be episodes of depression.

These are the signs to look out for on the downward side -

- withdrawal from social activities
- crying frequently
- suicidal thoughts
- reduced emotional response
- disturbed sleep specially in mornings
- poor appetite
- feelings of worthlessness
- general tiredness
- restlessness
- lack of interest
- blaming self for problems
- preoccupied with guilt
- low energy
- slowed mental functions

In addition, suicide is a very real possibility in depression and irreversible! So, one should be alert for any signs of suicidal thoughts or intentions.

Causes of Manic Depressive Psychosis

Manic depressive psychosis is an inherited problem. The reasons for this illness exist in the genetic make up of the person. Often, more than one person in a family will have the same problem but this is not necessary - the tendency to develop the disease can be there without it actually happening. It is a matter of body chemistry and internal biological clock. Psychological stress can act as a trigger for the problem or can make the symptoms worse. Sometimes there is seasonal variation or circumstances after repeated episodes could precipitate future episodes. Alcohol and drugs are known to precipitate attacks, especially of depression. Similarly some physical illnesses or medicines may also precipitate an episode.

When to Consult the Psychiatrist

If you notice pronounced mood swings and changes from normal to up, from normal to down or from up to down, it would be advisable to check with the psychiatrist for presence of manic depressive psychosis. If a

person begins to behave violently or is otherwise destructive, or if daily routine and social life is disrupted and there is the danger that the person may do himself harm, consult the psychiatrist.

Treatment of Mood Disorders :

Medication works best for Manic depressive psychosis. The treatment, which must be taken regularly and for a long period of time, controls the episodes with a high rate of success. When the problem is especially severe, the person may have to be hospitalized until he or she starts behaving normally again.

Work therapy and exercises:— During an episode of depression, the person may lose confidence of being able to do anything in future and feeling in control through work helps the person feel better. Mixing with people and engaging in social activities also plays an important part. Exercise builds up certain chemicals which have anti depression activity. Work, exercise and social interaction works off some excess energy in manic episodes but one must ensure that this does not further stimulate the excitement.

Counseling:— The person recovering from a mood disorder may need help with getting his or her life back together. Advice may be needed on how to handle stress situations and on how to get back to ' living as normal a life as possible.

Prevention :— It is possible to control the future episodes of Mania or Depression if the episodes are:— Frequent, Occurring very rapidly, Switches from Depression to Mania very fast without periods of normalcy, Increasing in number, Lasting for prolonged periods and very severe.

Precautions :— The episodes once started do not usually go away on their own and before the episode is over, violence to others or self; total breakdown of work, social support and family are real dangers.

The treatment is to be started immediately and person helped/restrained from making any long term mistakes. The family also must not make the patient a focus of attention and should try and network with other familiar to ensure learning from each other as well as give support.

Although mood disorder is an illness, we should not forget that some people after controlling their mood disorders have done great and novel work in the history of mankind!

Courtesy: www.rahat.org

Further Queries:

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Meditation As Medication

Meditations as a Technique less useful compared to Meditative Life Style

Meditation

- ❖ Root word – ‘Medere’ which means to make ‘whole’. Healing also comes from the same root word.
- ❖ Found in all cultures, religions and regions (West/East).
- ❖ Has taken on a very esoteric meaning but is just a disciplined way of reflecting on self, one’s relationship with the world and God, present and future path of life and meaning/higher purpose in life.
- ❖ The techniques and range differs from practices of concentration, awareness or altered states of consciousness. It may be focused (Mantra) or non directional.
- ❖ It may be a practice for a short time or a way of being (with a particular life style).

- ⊗ It is most effective when practiced with non-judgment attitude of gratitude while letting go of thoughts and emotions.
- ⊗ It may be individual or group. It may be accompanied by incense, music, special colors or light etc.

Meditation Techniques

- * Rajyoga
- * Transcendental
- * Vipassana
- * Patanjali
- * Pranayam
- * Sudershan kriya
- * Buddhist
- * Others

Principles of Meditation

- ◆ Relaxation
- ◆ Oxygenation
- ◆ Imagery
- ◆ Visualization
- ◆ Concentration
- ◆ Self-hypnosis
- ◆ Cognitive Therapy
- ◆ Peak-experiences
- ◆ Secretion of endorphins

How Meditation works?

- It raises the energy levels and strengthens the immune system to fight/ward off illnesses.
- It induces relaxation response and the associated psychophysiological processes.
- It acts on the Karmic/Sanskar levels to neutralize the causes and effects of illness.
- It enhances the positivity of the person about self and healing, thus setting off chain reactions of healing.
- It induces a connection to the source (God) to draw the power to heal.
- It stimulates life style changes which are useful for self healing and allow the external healing forces to act better.

If practiced regularly for 20-45 minutes (once/twice per day), all meditations produce the relaxation response accompanied by -

- ▶ Decreased heart rate and blood pressure
- ▶ Increased blood flow to brain and heart
- ▶ Positive changes in EEG, EMG and skin resistance
- ▶ Improved sleep and digestion
- ▶ Less irritability, anxiety and depression on rating scales
- ▶ Less frequency and duration of illnesses
- ▶ Decreased accidents and man days lost at work
- ▶ Improved interpersonal relationships
- ▶ Improved scores on self actualization inventories, emotional and spiritual quotients.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION AT BODY-MIND LEVEL FOUND IN –

- ⊙ Allergies
- ⊙ Asthma
- ⊙ Anxiety
- ⊙ Acid-peptic disease
- ⊙ Cancer
- ⊙ Coronary disease
- ⊙ Depression (Neurotic)
- ⊙ Diabetes
- ⊙ Hypertension
- ⊙ Irritable bowel syndrome
- ⊙ Migraine
- ⊙ Substance abuse (Tobacco & Alcohol also)
- ⊙ Tension, headache & etc.
- ⊙ Healing and recovery from all diseases enhanced.

Relative Contra Indications

- ➔ Psychosis
- ➔ Severe Depression
- ➔ Confusional States
- ➔ Extreme Anxiety
- ➔ Dementias

Meditation and Medication

- ◆ Meditation need not be instead of medical treatment and can be co-prescribed.
- ◆ Meditation need not be only for 'patients' but medical and paramedical professionals also benefit from it, especially for their own stress.
- ◆ Meditation as medication at medical establishment improves the functioning and rates of recovery as well as reduces cost of treatment with comprehensive, holistic recovery of the client at all levels.
- ◆ There is now increasing evidence of efficacy of many therapeutic techniques like Yoga, Meditation, Prayers and Spirituality based interventions.
- ◆ There is increasing desire by the society and mental health professionals to integrate values in self and in therapy as well as adopt a transpersonal, humanistic approach.

WE ARE SPIRIT MATERIALIZED, ENGAGED IN SPIRITUALIZING MATTER.

WE ARE NOT HUMAN BEINGS, HAVING A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE.

WE ARE SPIRITUAL BEINGS, HAVING A HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

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