

ask Dr Roshan Jain

Your *mental and emotional health* questions answered

Q I get extremely nervous when I have to do a presentation or speak in front of colleagues at work. I joined work recently and was doing okay until my boss pressured me to do a presentation. I couldn't do it and made excuses. This has undermined my confidence and chances of progress at workplace. Kindly help.

Your problem is common and easily treatable. You may not know, but fear of speaking in public or small group is the most common form of anxiety disorder. It's called Social Anxiety, wherein one is almost paralysed with anxiety. If an opportunity of speaking is avoided, it reinforces the fear, followed by other behaviours such as avoidance (for e.g. excuses) or anticipatory anxiety for future events.

The root cause of such anxiety may be underlying low self-esteem and low confidence, on a background of core beliefs about competence and failure (e.g. If I fail, I'll be rejected; I'm not capable). There might be triggers such as a single or multiple traumatic incidents, usually experienced personally but sometimes associated with someone in similar situation, or even a slow build-up from avoiding public speaking over time until it builds into a more severe form of illness or disorder.

I suggest behavioural approaches for your difficulties. For example, taking a few deep breaths, using an ice breaker to start - like introducing yourself or even presenting a quote or joke, meditating briefly before the presentation, or even the old method of 'ridiculous thinking' - imagining all audience members in their underwear! There is no substitute for preparation,

practice and more practice. Practice will desensitise you and build confidence. Importantly, if you feel passionate about your topic, you will find public speaking far easier.

If all else fails, please see a psychiatrist for assistance with formal behavioural therapy. Additionally, he/she may prescribe medication belonging to 'beta blockers' group to control accelerated heart (seen in anxiety state), or a short course of anti-anxiety drug to reduce apprehension.

Q What can I expect when I see a psychiatrist? After such consultation there is fear of being labelled with mental illness, being prescribed excessive sedating medicines or even being hospitalised in a psychiatric facility!

You are right. Such misperceptions and apprehensions still exist, possibly due to stigma of mental illness and misrepresentation of those suffering from one.

Thankfully, this is on a rapid decline, evidenced from an increasing number of people proactively seeking consultation for mental health problems, but much more commonly for guidance, support, counselling, resolution of common interpersonal relation problems, besides stress management and emotional wellness.

A psychiatrist is a warm, caring and attentive clinician who treats all individuals with respect, irrespective of the nature of their problem, guiding them to a solution. Understandably the consultation may last longer (30 minutes to an hour), and the questions will explore problems, as well as their

impact on functioning, and personal background. The aim is to understand the 'whole' person rather than just presenting issues. Sometimes, close family members or friends are involved in assessment, following consent of the consulting individual. Confidentiality is of paramount importance.

Most people are treated on an outpatient basis. Medicine may be prescribed alongside Psychotherapy (talking therapy). Expect extensive education about your difficulties, diagnosis, treatment and long-term outcome. Specialist outpatient based one-to-one therapy or group treatment program and/or day hospital attendance may be advised. This may be besides tips for lifestyle changes and taking upon activities that build confidence and self-esteem. Hospitalisation may be required if there is significant mental illness.

Our doctors will answer all queries on emotional and mental health. Got mind trouble of your own? Drop us a mail at bpositiveQA@apollolife.com Or write to

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