



Ways To Cope With Anxiety

We live in a dynamic, ever-changing and challenging environment, so it's quite normal to feel stressed and anxious from time-to-time, especially if you live a high-pressure life. Anxiety can be about upcoming exams or an interview, life changing events, relationship matters, financial issues, or something as seemingly innocuous as social gatherings, etc. Anxiety is excessive or pathological when it arises in the absence of challenge or stress and when it is disproportionate in

duration and severity to an underlying problem.

Also, contrary to common myths, anxiety is normal and perhaps even helpful, as in moderation, it may provide us with a boost of energy or help us focus better. In other words, it can mobilize an anticipatory and adaptive response to a challenge or stressful events. However, for many, anxiety takes the shape of a constant companion and they therefore, look for anxiety in any given scenario. Excess anxiety can destabilize an individual and result

in a dysfunctional state. Moreover, when anxiety and nervousness become continuous, they are deemed as 'disorders,' calling for medical intervention.

Feelings Of Nervousness Vs. Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a subjective feeling of being in a state of worry, fear, unease, apprehension or discomfort, often accompanied by physical features such as awareness of heartbeat, trembling, sweating, headaches, dizziness, etc. Anxiety is expected when a person responds to a real or potential danger.

The factors that differentiate nervousness from an anxiety disorder are its pervasive, unremitting, disproportionate and irrational nature. Anxiety in the context of stress is generally a temporary experience and remits with a change in routine or following relaxation. However, when the pressure is relentless, it can precipitate breakdown and a vast array of physical and psychological ailments.

Types Of Anxiety Disorders

There are many types of anxiety disorders and each of their presentations varies. For example, in Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), an individual will experience generalized non-specific continuous anxiety with catastrophic thoughts that are not situation-specific.

In a Panic Disorder, one reports a sudden severe bout of anxiety with marked physical features such as tremors, palpitation (awareness of heartbeat), chest discomfort and shortness of breath, alongside intense apprehension about fear of passing out, losing control or dying.

In a Phobic Disorder, there is situation-specific anxiety, for example a fear of heights or enclosed spaces or certain animals. It is a case of

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder when intrusive irrational thoughts, for instance, about contamination with compulsive behaviour of repeated washing/cleaning, are present to reduce anxiety, followed by re-emergence of those thoughts.

Likewise, hypochondriasis (aka health phobia) is an unremitting fear of developing a sinister ailment, despite medical examination and investigation results. Stress-related anxiety will commonly present with psychosomatic (bodily manifestation of psychological problems) features such as headaches, body aches, dizzy spells, abdominal discomfort and insomnia, etc.

Can We Spot Anxiety In Others?

Unlike physical ailments, anxiety can be hard to spot, since they don't manifest with visible spots or rise in body temperature. However, if you know what you are looking for, then it becomes a little easier to discern a highly-strung person from more intense and disordered anxiety. Here are seven signs that a friend or family member might have an anxiety disorder:

- Often appearing on the edge and irritable.
- Giving a sense of being on edge, easily startled or even hyper-vigilant.
- Expressing fearful and catastrophic thoughts.
- Sleeping poorly or waking tired
- Doing things a certain way to reduce anxiety and regain a feeling of control.
- Being avoidant of situation that prompt worry or anxiety.
- Unable to rationalize easily or examine beliefs in a logical way.

Ten Ways To Cope With Anxiety

- 1 Stop And Think:** Anxiety is typically about the past (what should have happened) or the future (what might happen). Herein, the precious 'present moments' are lost. So, when anxiety flares up, step back and take timeout to think mindfully and contemplate the worries.
- 2 Let Go:** Anxiety builds on fear and tension. So let go of things that seem unresolvable and allow for solutions to unravel.
- 3 Acceptance:** This is a prerequisite to change. We endure life's difficulties far too long before considering a remedy - we must accept our vulnerability to stress, tension and anxiety.
- 4 Take Regular Breaks:** We all need a break from our daily regimented grind and routine. Moreover, breaks provide us with a broader perspective and encourage a solution orientation.
- 5 Prioritise Sleep:** Sleep deprivation is a health hazard leading to a wide array of problems including hypertension, heart problems, diabetes and psychological problems like anxiety, depression and addictions. Prioritise sleep and ensure you get seven-eight hours of sound sleep per night. Good sleep is also essential for rest, recovery and rejuvenation.
- 6 Exercise:** When done for 30-45 minutes, four days a week, exercise has proven to be effective in combating anxiety and depression. Also, as the saying goes, food is one of the most commonly abused anti-anxiety substances and exercise is the most underutilized antidepressant - let's reverse the trend!
- 7 Mindful Meditation:** This can help you cultivate an ability to focus on things that matter and empty your mind of irrational clutter. Being mentally calmer from the outset will allow for a more in-depth perspective on an evolving situation.
- 8 Speak Up:** Talking about your worries, being heard and affirmations can have enormous therapeutic benefits. Moreover, opening up can raise self-awareness and encourage an individual to consider remedial actions. However, it's best done in a formal setting with a professional. This is because; unlike family or friends an expert will be objective, attentive and offer timely advice.
- 9 Calming Medication:** For some, a short course of tranquillizers (lorazepam or clonazepam) may help break the cycle of anxiety and apprehension. But we need to be cautious of its addictive nature, especially when taken daily for four-six weeks. Also, as this medication should be prescribed by a medical practitioner, always consult your doctor first.
- 10 Antidepressant Course:** Antidepressants are non-addictive and safer, but are required to be taken for six-twelve weeks after an initial episode. Additionally, research has established its effectiveness in a wide array of anxiety and depressive disorders. However, it's important to note that there is sufficient data to suggest that a combination of antidepressant and psychotherapy is more effective than either one alone. 