

## **Anxiety Disorders**

Even though some people do not realize it, fear and anxiety are a normal part of life. As an example, you may be walking down a quiet, dark street and feel a sense of anxiety or fear because you are not sure what, if anything, is going to happen. You may be tense and your senses heighten so you hear and see everything. Your heart starts beating more rapidly, and you may be shaky. If necessary, your body and mind are prepared for fighting or fleeing.

### **Some functions of anxiety are:**

1) Anxiety prepares our bodies for action. There are times when we do need to be very aware of our surroundings and be ready to fight or flee if there is danger. In this situation, a person can be very relaxed at one moment and very anxious the next moment. There may be a rapid heart beat, faster rate of breathing, or trembling.

2) Anxiety may also cause us to plan ahead so we can deal with any potential dangers. On the other hand, continuous worry is not typical; it may be a sign of anxiety disorder.

### **There are Several Types of Anxiety Disorders:**

#### **1) Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

Generalized anxiety disorder is an anxiety disorder in which a person is very frequently tense, apprehensive, and in a state of autonomic nervous system arousal. People with this disorder cannot seem to be rid of their worries and tension. They may agonize about money, family, or work, or sometimes they cannot pinpoint their worries at all. These strong worries are also accompanied by physical symptoms such as trembling, irritability, sweating, fatigue, and headaches.

## **2) Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is an anxiety disorder characterized by unwanted repetitive thoughts (obsessions) and/or actions (compulsions) that a person feels he/she cannot control. Obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors cross the line between normality and disorder when they become so persistent that they interfere with the way one lives or when they cause distress. Some examples of repetitive behaviors are hand washing, checking locks, counting, and cleaning. For instance, checking once to see if the door is locked is normal; checking 10 times is not. For people with OCD, repetitive rituals like hand washing and checking locks consume over an hour a day and interfere with their daily lifestyle. It should also be mentioned here that when a person with OCD fulfills the compulsion (e.g., hand washing) he/she feels better for a little while, but this is only a temporary relief from the anxiety that is experienced when the ritual is not performed.

## **3) Panic Disorder**

Panic disorder consists of a minutes-long episode of intense dread in which a person experiences terror and accompanying chest pain, choking, trembling, or other frightening sensations. Some people that suffer from panic attacks may even believe they are having a heart attack and seek medical attention. They may visit a hospital or see a doctor repeatedly before obtaining a diagnosis of panic disorder. The experience is unpredictable and so frightening that the sufferer may avoid situations where attacks have occurred. For example, if a person was driving through a tunnel and had a panic attack he/she may relate the attack to that particular situation and develop a fear of tunnels. This association may then restrict his/her lifestyle.

#### **4) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a debilitating condition that can develop following a terrifying event or ordeal where there was a great amount of physical harm or death was threatened. A few examples of events that can lead to PTSD are natural disasters, accidents, military combat, child abuse, and rape. Those who suffer from PTSD may repeatedly relive the frightening thoughts and memories about their ordeal throughout the day and in nightmares. People with this disorder may not show signs of closeness to the people they care about; they may seem numb to such emotions. People with this disorder may be depressed, have trouble sleeping, may startle easily, and may be irritable.

#### **5) Social Phobia (or Social Anxiety Disorder)**

Social Phobia is an anxiety disorder characterized by a high level of self-consciousness. People with this disorder feel that others are watching and judging their every move. When this happens, they feel embarrassed. These feelings can be so negative that they will avoid social situations altogether. It should also be mentioned that Social Phobia can be limited to a specific situation, like speaking in front of a large group, or eating in front of others. One can also have a generalized form of Social Phobia where one feels anxious in most social situations. Some physical symptoms of social phobia are sweating, nausea, trembling, and difficulty talking when in a social or performance situation.

#### **Treatments for Anxiety Disorders**

Anxiety disorders are the most common of all emotional disorders. Some people think that they should be able to overcome symptoms themselves but this is not the case.

Much research has been done in this area and there are treatments available. The two most common treatments are counseling and medication.

A visit with your doctor is the best place to begin if you think you have symptoms of anxiety. After a careful assessment, your doctor can tell you if the symptoms can really be attributed to an anxiety disorder, and possibly which anxiety disorder or disorders you have.