

PANIC DISORDERS / ATTACKS

Anxiety attacks which are not linked to any particular situation is the most common symptom of a panic disorder. The main symptoms of panic attacks include sudden palpitations, chest pain (some people say a panic attack is like a heart attack), choking sensations, dizziness and feelings of unreality. For some, panic attacks may cause people to have a fear of losing control, going mad or even dying.

SOCIAL PHOBIA / SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

People who fear what other people think of them and as a result avoid social situations are considered to have a social phobia. Symptoms include blushing, hand tremor, nausea with the possibility of it progressing to panic attacks. Social phobias are associated with a fear of criticism and low self esteem. Counselling and psychotherapy may be effective treatments in enhancing your self esteem and sense of self.

PHOBIC DISORDER

A phobia is the persistent, irrational fear of – and wish to avoid – an object, activity or situation that causes severe anxiety in someone. There are specific phobias (fear of heights, spiders etc), that are easy for people to handle but there are other phobias - like agoraphobia (fear of open spaces) or social phobias - that are much less manageable. These can have a dramatic effect on the quality of life of sufferers who often severely limit their activities to avoid situations that make them anxious.

HOW TO COMBAT ANXIETY

If you think you have an anxiety disorder, you should talk to your GP, psychologist, counsellor or psychotherapist. He/she has the experience to listen to you and assess whether what you feel is nervousness, an anxiety disorder, depression, or something else. Depending on the severity of your anxiety, your GP may suggest counselling, medicines or both.

By identifying the problem, you will be taking the first step in your treatment for it, so be as honest as you can when seeking professional help.

tips to help you cope

AWARENESS / EDUCATION

The more you know and learn about your anxiety, the better you will be able to cope with and overcome it. There are numerous sources of information that you can avail of, but the first step you should take is to contact a healthcare professional.

POSITIVE THINKING

You know that avoiding things that make you anxious doesn't solve the problem – it makes it worse. Try not to avoid these situations, have confidence in your ability to cope with them and don't be too hard on yourself.

STRUCTURING THE DAY

Setting yourself goals and challenges is a good way to fight anxiety – use lists to help identify things you want to overcome. Involve family or friends, they should provide much needed support and encouragement.

RELAXATION

When you feel anxious, try to think of situations where you felt calm. Perhaps listening to music relaxes you, playing sport, or reading a book. It might be worth investing in some audio tapes that teach you specific relaxation techniques, particularly if you are having trouble sleeping. Meditation or yoga can also help enhance relaxation.

EXERCISE

Taking regular exercise helps the body to naturally produce a sense of well-being and it can trigger brain chemicals that will improve your mood. Being fit can also help you feel more positive about yourself.

WATCH WHAT YOU EAT / DRINK

Ideally you should aim to eat food that is high in fibre and low in fat and stay away from tea and coffee. Alcohol and caffeine can increase anxiety levels.

TALK TO SOMEONE

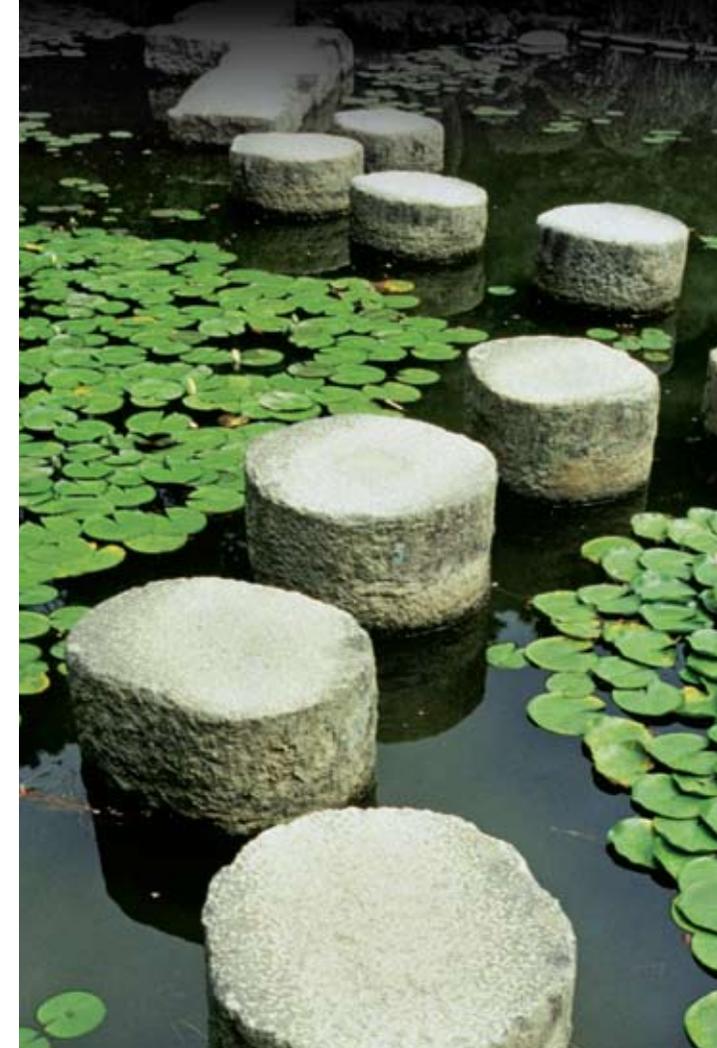
'A problem shared is a problem halved' the old expression goes. Talking to family and friends is a good way to confront any problems you may have with anxiety and those closest to you can offer support. Talking to your GP, a counsellor or psychotherapist may also help you better understand your anxiety, how it affects you and how you may deal with it more effectively.

REFERENCES

1. *Guidelines for the Management of Depression and Anxiety Disorders in Primary Care*, ICGP/HSE
2. 'All about Anxiety – a booklet for those wanting to know more about anxiety' – The Mental Health Foundation, London, UK.
3. ICD-10: F40-F48, World Health Organisation, 2006.

Further information regarding Accredited Counsellors and Psychotherapists is available at www.irishtalk-counselling.ie.

anxiety in everyday life



anxiety in everyday life

Anxiety is a common experience for both men and women. Depending on the type and severity of anxiety, it can have a debilitating impact on your quality of life. For some, anxiety can be a passing emotion, attached to stressful situations such as exams, getting married or work pressures.

However, sometimes experiencing anxiety is more than just a passing emotion. It is a condition which can have a severe impact on daily life. The Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) defines anxiety as '...an unpleasant emotional state. It is characterised by the feeling of fear and frequently distressing physical symptoms'. The feelings associated with an anxiety disorder include a racing heart, rapid breathing, abdominal discomfort, sweating, excessive and undue worrying, sleep disturbance, muscle tension, morbid thoughts and a fear of going mad.

There are many types of anxiety disorders. If you believe you have an anxiety disorder or experience some of the symptoms listed above, talk to a healthcare professional. Those with anxiety problems, even severe ones, can overcome them and help is at hand, so take the first step and discuss the matter with a healthcare professional.

what is anxiety?

Anxiety can be described as a feeling of discomfort or unease. Anxiety which continues for a long time can have a serious effect on your ability to cope with everyday life. Although you may not be able to identify a specific cause for your anxiety disorder, or indeed if your anxiety is associated with a place or situation, it is quite normal to experience anxiety / fear when faced with a difficult or dangerous situation. However, it is not healthy to feel anxious all the time or allow it to severely interfere with your life.

Although in some instances your anxiety may have no apparent cause, individuals who are considered most 'at-risk' of developing an anxiety disorder include those who have undergone a major life event such as bereavement, a relationship break up, unemployment, those who misuse drugs or alcohol, or people with a family history of anxiety.

A short term solution that people with anxiety often choose is avoidance. If certain situations make you feel anxious, why not just skip them altogether? Unfortunately, avoiding the problem of anxiety does not make it go away. You only limit what you can do and you never have the chance to test whether the situation you avoid is really that frightening. Without facing your fear, you can never realise that you can cope with it and it will pass, thereby enjoying a better quality of life.



anxiety disorders explained

Many of the symptoms of anxiety are common to the different anxiety disorders. The following categories may be helpful in trying to understand the type of anxiety disorder you may be suffering from. Doctors use these categories because they are helpful in pin pointing the best treatment for those who have anxiety disorders.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

This is the term given to the after-effects of an unusually frightening or horrifying experience such as witnessing a death, surviving a traumatic event, or losing a number of close family members. If you have PTSD you tend to re-live the traumatic moment (flashbacks, dreams & nightmares) and this can lead to you avoiding places or activities that remind you of the experience. It is natural to be upset in the aftermath of a traumatic experience, so the term PTSD is only applicable if the feelings persist – it should not be confused with naturally stressful situations such as grief following the death of a loved one.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

OCD is when a person has obsessional thoughts or engages in compulsive acts on an on-going basis. Obsessional thoughts are ideas, images, or impulses that enter a person's mind which are often distressing, so much so that a person will try not to think about them. Compulsive acts, or rituals, are behaviours or acts that are repeated again and again that are of no particular purpose. They are simply carried out to avoid the fear associated with an event which may cause harm. Usually, if a person tries to stop their compulsive acts, their anxiety worsens.

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD) & FREE FLOATING ANXIETY

Having GAD means that the anxiety is not associated with any particular thing or trigger, it is "free floating". Symptoms can vary but include feelings of persistent nervousness, trembling, muscular pain, sweating, light-headedness, palpitations, dizziness and abdominal pain.

MIXED ANXIETY DEPRESSION DISORDER

Some people might have an anxiety disorder that has elements of depression attached to anxiety, this is known as mixed anxiety depression disorder. Talking to a health professional will help access the best treatment available in relation to this type of anxiety disorder.