

Anxiety

Feeling anxious is okay, especially if it's occasional. Anxiousness or Anxiety is a natural response to stress or threat, it keeps us alert and focused to spur into action if needed. It is when the body enters a "Fight or Flight response", however, an anxiety disorder occurs when the person is highly anxious all the time. When anxiety impacts the ability to conduct daily tasks and engage with other people.

"I worry about everything, I get tense and wound up, and end up snapping"

This example could be some of the thoughts that occur repetitively in your head, the impatient wait for important news or living an unpredictable situation could lead to an inner turmoil of anxiousness, a state of psychological tension. If you are in a dangerous or unfamiliar situation, like facing your biggest fear or jumping out of a plane this is just flat-out fear. In the short run, these emotions adapt to the situation because the energy enables us to cope with danger. Being scared and anxious could lead to a detachment from the actual danger or feelings continue even when danger and uncertainty are past.

Anxiety is not singular but there are different types, all characterized by persistent or severe fear, in situations where most people wouldn't feel threatened:

- *Generalized anxiety*: individuals display excessive anxiety or worry over an extended period. The fear is not always focused in an issue and may fluctuate.
- *Panic disorder*: Individuals have recurrent panic attacks (periods of intense fear and physical symptoms)
- *Social anxiety/social phobia*: fear social situations/engagements in which they expect to feel embarrassed, humiliated, judged or rejected.

Some anxiety is not helpful because:

- Symptoms of anxiety, while not dangerous can be uncomfortable
- Symptoms can be frightening, especially if someone does not know that these symptoms are signs of anxiety and not something else
- People with anxiety symptoms worry that they may have something seriously wrong with them. This can produce more anxiety symptoms which then increases the worry!
- When it is severe, it can stop people doing what they want to do
- If it goes for a long time, it can make physical problems worse

Causes:

- Developing an anxiety disorder is inherited, to an extent
- Some people have an anxious personality
- Environmental factors play a role in the development of anxiety, it may be a result of triggered exposure to a traumatic event (severe or long lasting stress)

- Others may feel under pressure at work (long hours, understaffed, piles and piles of to do's)
- At home, it could be financial, family or relationship problems
- Anxiety often co-exists with other related conditions, such as depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Some physical health issues and medications could also exacerbate anxiety disorder

It can affect us in four ways:

- How we feel
- How we think
- How the body works
- How we behave

What keeps it going?

1. Anxious personality and worries lead to a habit of feeling anxious
2. Ongoing stress over the years can help develop anxiousness
3. Vicious circle of anxiety: unusual body symptoms, automatically thinking that something awful is going to happen which causes more symptoms...
4. Fear of Fear- predict feeling of anxiousness and become frightened of the symptoms which can cause these feared symptoms
5. Avoidance or escape- entering the vicious cycle, increase in anxious thoughts and avoidance used as a way of coping



Ways to help:

- Behavioral and lifestyle changes could help make a difference in managing anxiety.
- Sleep and exercise, practicing relaxation techniques, limiting caffeine and alcohol intake could also help narrow down your emotions.
- "Sharing is Caring" – sharing your anxieties with sympathetic friends and connecting with people who you feel most comfortable with could help train the mind to become calmer.
- Challenging anxious thoughts while learning to accept uncertainty helps make anxiety better.
- Anxiety diary (2 weeks or longer), keep note of your anxiety and activity level during that period and rate it from 0-10. Note down anything that seems important. Your thoughts and where you were? Become aware of situations that make you anxious or make you avoidant. Rate your stress level? This information can help you begin tackling your anxiety.

- If anxiety is continuous and occurring on a majority of days during a six-month period it becomes overwhelming and impacts the quality of life. This is the best time to seek for professional help. Anxiety generally responds well to therapy, within a short space of time.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) teaches individuals to adopt different ways of thinking, behaving and reacting to anxious and fearful situations. It can also help in the practice of social skills (individually or with a group).
- Group therapy is particularly effective for social anxiety.
- If therapy is not effective, medication may be used in combination with therapy.

For further information or a confidential discussion, please contact Staff Welfare: swo@iom.int