

A Moment to Mind Yourself



Managing Anxiety Conditions

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As we continue our mental health education and awareness series, this month we'll provide a general overview of anxiety disorders. While it's normal to feel occasional anxiety and worry about challenges such as health, finances or family issues, some people experience such constant feelings of dread and distress that it interferes with their daily functioning at work, school or in relationships.

Examples of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder (social phobia), specific phobias and separation anxiety disorder. It's possible to have more than one anxiety disorder. Often, anxiety disorders involve repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks).

These feelings of anxiety and panic are difficult to control, are out of proportion to the actual danger and can last a long time. People may avoid places or situations to prevent these feelings. While that can provide short term relief, in the long term it can have a negative impact on the person's quality of life by narrowing their experiences and connections with others.

Symptoms include feelings of constant worry, tension or dread. They often include physical symptoms such as trembling, increased heart rate, dizziness, sweating, blushing and gastrointestinal distress.

Causes of anxiety include medical conditions such as heart or thyroid problems, hormonal changes, family history, traumatic life events, prolonged stress, or drug or alcohol use. Some personalities are more prone to anxiety such as perfectionistic or introverted type individuals. Anxiety doesn't discriminate and can be experienced in a wide range of ages including children, teens and the elderly.

Anxiety at this level if left untreated can get worse and does usually warrant treatment in the form of counseling support and/or medication depending on the type of disorder.

For mild or moderate anxiety, implementing some lifestyle changes can be beneficial.

- Avoid/minimize caffeine, alcohol and other drugs
- Engage in some form of daily exercise which raises the heart rate (walking or running)
- Walk outside regularly, preferably in nature
- Spend time interacting with trusted friends/family
- Meditate, practice deep breathing or mindfulness techniques regularly

There are many techniques and approaches to help reduce or manage anxious thoughts and symptoms. One example to help shift your focus from anxiety-provoking thoughts to the present moment, is the 54321-grounding technique:

Identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

For moderate to severe anxiety which needs professional treatment, you can reach out for free and confidential support for you or a family member to Gina or Danielle at the Irish Pastoral Centre: 617-265-5300 or e-mail: ggallagher@ipcbboston.org or dowen@ipcbboston.org

Additional Resources:

More information about anxiety disorders
<https://namimass.org/>

Tips and strategies to manage anxiety and stress
<https://adaa.org/tips>

NAMI MA Compass Helpline:
617-704-6264 or 1-800-370-9085
<http://www.namimass.org/>