

# ANXIETY



## What Is Anxiety?

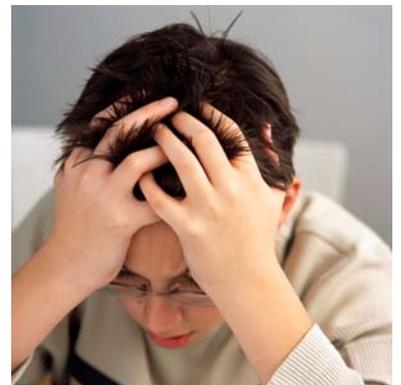
Anxiety is related to WORRY. “Worry” is the tendency to “fret” about the things that are making us stressed. So ANXIETY is related to Stress, and reflects our level of confidence in coping with – dealing with – our stressors. We mentally replay the same anxious thoughts and “what ifs” over –and – over. We “ruminate” and even worry about worrying. Compton’s Dictionary defines worry, in part, as: *1. to feel troubled or uneasy; make anxious; distress -- 2. To feel distressed in the mind; be anxious, troubled, or uneasy* (Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia © 1998 The Learning Company, Inc.).<sup>①</sup>

**ANXIETY** is an inner feeling of apprehension, uneasiness, Concern, worry and/or dread that is accompanied by heightened Physical arousal. The threats can be real or imagined. It has its roots in the "fight or flight" aspect of our biological make-up.

A certain amount of anxiety is quite normal and actually helps to protect us by putting us on guard against those things that would - or could - harm us. Anxiety is normal, logical and rational, when it is in response to a real threat or situational danger -like being drafted when a war is on or facing your fiancé’s family for the first time. In all cases of "Normal Anxiety" the fear and apprehension never come to the point where it prevents us from functioning.

**BUT ANXIETY IS ABNORMAL** when it is of such intensity that it prevents us from going about our day-to-day affairs. It is not normal or healthy when it jeopardizes our schooling, our jobs and our family life. Abnormal Anxiety is fear that is out of control and out of proportion to the reality of the perceived threat (the elephant and mouse syndrome). When we put life on hold or live each day with a constant knot in the pit of our stomach then we have an Anxiety Disorder and a problem.

**ANXIETY** occurs in three forms: Situational, Free -Floating and Trait.




---

<sup>①</sup> Note: There are really two forms of anxiety: GOOD (Healthy) ANXIETY and BAD (Unhealthy or Dysfunctional) ANXIETY. Most literature (self-help books and the like) and most mental health professionals focus on the latter. Here is a way to differentiate the two :

\* **GOOD (Healthy) ANXIETY** is Hope Based. There is a pleasant sense of excitement and of anticipation akin to what you may have felt on Christmas Eve as a child or before graduation. It involves feelings and thoughts that are motivating and encouraging.

\* **BAD (Unhealthy) ANXIETY** is fear based. There are feelings of fear, apprehension and dread. It plays a role in Depression and feelings of anger or frustration. It is De-motivating and may lead to feelings or thoughts of hopelessness.

**Situational Anxiety** – as the name implies – is specific to a given situation or environment. Whenever you find yourself in a similar stress inducing situation – such as writing an exam – you feel anxious (worried, tense, fretful).

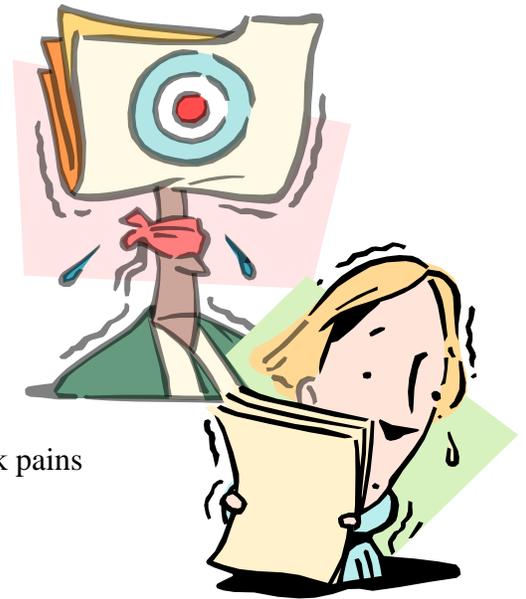
**Free-Floating Anxiety** – has no specific situation or environment as a trigger, it can “come out of the blue” so to speak. In more severe forms it leads to spontaneous panic attacks.

**Trait Anxiety** -is both biological and psychological in nature giving rise to a persistent ever-present, ingrained emotional tension. It often causes physical illness to manifest because the body cannot function effectively when it remains in a perpetual state of tension and arousal. It is sometimes referred to as “Anticipatory Anxiety” – a state of being continuously alert to anxiety inducing states.

## ANXIETY and the BODY

Anxiety takes a toll on the body. Here are some typical warning signs that you may be under too much anxiety.

1. Heart palpitations.
2. Shortness of breath
2. Shaking and trembling for no apparent reason.
3. Difficulty sleeping
4. Racing thoughts;
5. Thoughts that you are losing your grip on reality or life is spiraling out of control.
6. Tense muscles; muscle aches and pain; back pains; and / or neck pains



## SIX WAYS of relieving Anxiety

1. Exercise ... join a gym, take up jogging, engage in whatever activity you find is a healthy diversion from the anxiety of daily life. [ BUT, avoid the pitfall of adding this to you “list of must do’s” , resulting in adding to your stress – and hence to your anxiety]



2. Journal your anxious thoughts and use a self-monitoring rating technique where you rate your anxious feelings on a scale of 1 (no anxiety) to 10 (Extremely Anxious).

3. Go for walks – preferably somewhere quiet. Take time to enjoy nature. Feel the grass, touch the trees, breath in the air.



4. Learn to meditate. This word worries some in the Christian community as they associate it with mysticism. However in therapeutic parlance, it means simply to RELAX and turn one's mind away from the mental 'To Do lists' and ponder the pleasantries and wonders of Life. Reflect on your inner –self and question why certain things make you anxious. Listen to you own inner dialogue: what you're telling you're self about your abilities to cope with what makes you stressed and anxious (or worried).
5. Learn to Prioritize and Learn to say NO to unreasonable demands.
6. Examine your diet. Eliminate or at least reduce stimulants such as caffeine. Sugar intake should also be reduced as well as red meats. Substitute with fish and poultry at least twice a week.



## ANXIETY & SELF-TALK

With Respect To Your Thought Life (Your Internal Self-Talk) see if you are prone to falling into one of these mental traps (what Psychologists call – *Cognitive Distortions*) Note these distortions can contribute to abnormal feelings of **anxiety** (feelings of anxiety are abnormal when they are out of proportion to the level of threat we are facing or if they cause you to have feelings that prevent you from carrying out normal daily activities (ie. Cause you to be dysfunctional as opposed to functional). :

**ALL – OR – NOTHING THINKING** : You see things in black –or –white categories. Anything less than perfect is unacceptable ; everything you undertake must be completed 100 % to be acceptable. Your glass is always half –empty , never seen as half – full; even three-quarter full is not good enough.

- 3-

**OVERGENERALIZATION** : A single negative event or bad experience causes you to assume that all subsequent events of this type will have the same unfavorable outcome.

**DISQUALIFYING or DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE:** You reject or underrate positive experiences in your life. Any compliments you receive you reject or play down.

**JUMPING TO PREMATURE CONCLUSIONS - ESPECIALLY OF A PESSIMISTIC VAIN.** You make a negative interpretation - and project the worst as an outcome- even though there is no supporting evidence.

**CATASTROPHIZING BY MAGNIFYING** your mistakes (or the magnitude of the problem) and **MINIMIZING** your abilities to cope with or solve the problems you encounter.

**NEGATIVE SELF -LABELING:** You gravitate to negative, unfavorable views and names for yourself, like: stupid; failure; dummy etc. You may even try to inject humor into these self-labels, and rationalize or justify such labeling as humility and meekness

**PERSONALIZATION :** You automatically assume - or accept - responsibility for things that go wrong around you and with which you were somehow involved - no matter how remotely.

### **HERE ARE FIVE OTHER WAYS TO HELP BUILD A POSITIVE MOOD**

1. Share with others ... Do things for other people, volunteer etc.
2. Build positive memories .... Go to interesting places; see new sites.
3. Congratulate yourself - treat yourself to something special – when you have done something well or achieved a significant milestone, or completed a major project.
4. Practice sharpening your perception abilities. Focus on the positives around you; let yourself take time to savor moments of pleasure; and
5. Absorb yourself each such moment.

### **LASTLY, DON'T RULE OUT USING AN ANTIDEPRESSANT**

Antidepressants are prescription drugs that help stimulate and regulate the level of neurochemicals necessary for neurons (brain cells) to communicate with each other. They are generally non-addictive and are effective in stopping the negative fixations and racing thoughts that characterize Depression as well as Anxiety. They act as a mood-booster while restoring the capacity to have clarity of thought necessary to address the underlying views and beliefs about life that feed depression.

Antidepressants typically take anywhere from two (2) to six (6) weeks to show measurable effects.

### **COMBINE WITH COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)**

CBT is a therapy approach that examines how Thoughts (called Cognitions) effect Behavior and Emotions. It is often our dysfunctional or malformed negative and anxious core beliefs about our self and our world that feeds, maintains and sustains our depression and anxiety. These thoughts are often “triggered” automatically by

specific situations, people and / or places. CBT will provide you with ways to better cope , identify the faulty life views or beliefs (called schema), and provide tools and techniques to challenge those beliefs and build new ones.

### CBT BASICS

