



About...

ANXIETY

Definition of Anxiety

Anxious feelings are the body's response to being in danger – real or perceived. It is an alarm system that is important for survival known as the fight or flight response. This response works so well that it can be triggered when it isn't needed. The system is activated when we think we are in danger even when we are not. People who are anxious tend to become hyper alert and hyper sensitive to signs of danger.

Anxiety is a normal, if sometimes unpleasant, part of life and can affect us in different ways and at different times. Most people can relate to feeling anxious when sitting an exam, going to the dentist or starting a new job. If all goes well, the anxiety will go away.

Anxiety can make people think that things are worse and prevent them from confronting their fears. Some people have identifiable causes for their anxiety such as a traumatic event or significant life changes. For others, anxiety is caused by an accumulation of stressors that build up over time without relief.

Symptoms of Anxiety

At the time of a traumatic event strong emotions affect the mind's ability to process the experience. Individuals may feel "stuck" with the distressing memory re-experiencing sights, smells, sounds and tastes associated with the original trauma. These memories may be triggered by something connected to the original trauma or may just "pop" into the individual's head.

People often experience physical, behavioural and psychological symptoms associated with anxiety. Some of the common symptoms include:

Physical

- Heart racing
- Rapid breathing
- Dizziness
- Tight feeling in chest
- Tension headaches
- Sweatiness
- Dry Mouth

Behavioural

- Avoiding people or places
- Only going out with someone else
- Leaving places early
- Going to anxiety provoking places but using coping behaviours such as smoking more, avoiding eye contact, medication, self-talk or having an escape plan

Thoughts

- Thinking you may lose control
- Thinking that you may die
- Thinking that you may have a heart attack, be sick, faint

Feelings

- Feeling you want to run away or escape the situation
- Feeling detached from others and your environment

What can help?

- Relaxation - practise calming or "mindful" breathing, yoga, meditation, massage
- Exercise – walking, running, gardening, swimming, housework
- Healthy diet – avoid stimulants such as caffeine, alcohol and cigarettes
- Talk to a family member or friend about how you are feeling