

Solutions

FAMILY
SERVICES



EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAMS

NEWSLETTER

Issue 28

Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a combination of feelings that create an overall reaction of uneasiness and uncertainty. We all feel anxious at one time or another and it usually passes quite quickly. Most of the time, anxiousness takes over before a big presentation or event, and it is often a common feeling when some sort of stress is introduced into our lives.

However, sometimes anxiousness can creep up without warning or sign and an intense feeling of fear, panic and worry takes over. When these feelings are far more intense than usual they are known as a Panic Attack.

Symptoms related to Panic Attacks

Symptoms related to Panic Attacks may include:

- Increased heart rate
- Laboured breathing
- Tightness in the chest
- Feeling dizzy, nauseous or light headed
- Shaking, trembling and excessive sweating
- Fear that you are going to go crazy or die

Some or all of these symptoms may occur suddenly without any warning. A panic attack causes you to feel great anxiety and uncertainty in a situation that normally does not bother you. For example, you may be sitting in your office working on a report and suddenly feel as though your life is in danger. Or similarly, be golfing with co-workers and collapse, feeling as though you are having a heart attack. The feeling usually passes quite quickly, but a ripple effect of similar attacks can occur for several hours.

Because they can appear spontaneously and seem unpredictable, panic attacks can make you worry constantly about when and where the next attack will occur. In all cases it is important to listen to your body and explore what is contributing to these attacks.

How to cope with Anxiety and Panic Attacks

Try to avoid things like caffeine, as it may increase your heart rate and aggravate anxiety and panic attack symptoms. Getting adequate rest and eating a balanced diet can also help in your overall health. If you do feel anxious or feel a panic attack approaching, remember that it will soon pass.

** Permission to photocopy with credit given to Caroline Chow of Family Services EAP, Calgary*

Anxiety (continued)

1. Take a long, slow breath in through your nose, first filling your lower lungs, then your upper lungs.
2. Hold your breath to the count of "three."
3. Exhale slowly while you relax the muscles in your face, jaw, shoulders, and stomach.

This often calms the body naturally because the following physical reactions occur:

- Oxygen consumption decreases
- Breathing slows
- Heart rate slows
- Blood pressure decreases
- Muscle tension decreases

Some people find it helpful to join courses or classes geared towards total body relaxation. These include meditation, tai chi and yoga. These help to focus your mind and body on relaxation and calmness. Most of these can be done on a lunch hour or during a break from work. Activities like meditation and imagery exercises can easily be done at your desk or quiet corners if you are feeling particularly stressed or feel a panic attack coming on.

If you do feel as though you are having a panic attack or feel especially anxious, try occupying your mind with other things.

Try to:

- Notice how it is affecting you and pay attention to how you would rather be feeling.

- Ask yourself what the anxiety is trying to tell you about your self-care.
- Remember to breathe.
- Engage in trivial talk.
- Try to limit discussion about the anxiety to less than 5% of your conversation.

Try not to:

- Isolate yourself. Anxiety will try to get you to think you should be alone. Don't listen to it.
- Spend time thinking about how you feel.
- Talk about anxiety more than 5% of the time.
- Let anxiety get you to second-guess yourself.
- Let anxiety get you to imagine what others are thinking.
- Fall prey to anxiety's ploy to engage in repetitive behaviours.
- Let it put images of disaster in your head.

Please contact your FSEAP professional to learn more about anxiety and panic attacks.

References:

American Psychological Association. *Public Affairs: Answers to your questions about panic disorder*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 2, 2002. [<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/panic.html>]

The Panic Disorder Institute. *Panic Disorders*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 2, 2002. [<http://www.algy.com/pdi/>]

Anxiety. *Panic Disorders Summary*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 3, 2002. [www.anxieties.com/1Panic/panic_attacks_summary.htm]

Planet Therapy. *Solutions for Anxiety: Dos and Don'ts*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 18, 2002. [http://www.planet-therapy.com/pub/gen_problems/anxiety/anxiety-solutions.html]

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:
1-800-668-9920