

Mental Health Matters

Plain Talk about Anxiety



*Mark Matta, D.O.,
Board Certified Psychiatrist*

Everyone feels anxious at some time or other. Anxiety is as much a part of life as eating or sleeping. In some situations, anxiety is beneficial. It heightens alertness and prepares our

bodies for action. But what does the word “anxiety” mean? Often times “anxiety” and “fear” are used to describe the same thing. When the word “anxiety” is used to discuss a group of mental illnesses, known as anxiety disorders, it refers to an unpleasant and overriding mental tension that has no apparent identifiable cause. Fear, on the other hand, causes mental tension due to a specific, external reason, such as when one’s car skids out of control on a sheet of ice. Fears are normal, until they become overwhelming and interfere with daily life. When this occurs, an anxiety disorder may be developing.

Anxiety disorders are classified based on the nature of the symptoms and whether there is something particular that triggers them. Generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorders are all anxiety disorders in which anxiety is the central symptom. These disorders are the most common and most successfully treated forms of mental illness.

Generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder will be the focus of the rest of this discussion. Generalized anxiety disorder (GAS) is suffered by people who experience unrealistic or excessive anxiety and worry about life circumstances. For example, they may feel panicky about financial matters even though they have a good bank balance and outstanding credit. Those with GAS may experience stretches of

time when they are not consumed by worry, but most times a chronic state of tension and irritability prevails.

Victims of panic disorder suddenly suffer intense, overwhelming terror for no apparent reason. The fear may be accompanied by trembling, heart palpitations, choking or smothering sensations, hot or cold flashes, and chest discomfort. Often, people suffering from a panic attack, for the first time, rush to the hospital convinced they are having a heart attack. Sufferers can not predict when the attacks will occur. The frequency and the intensity of the attacks may vary widely from one individual to another and within any one inflicted individual over a lifetime. Some people may only have a few lifetime panic attacks but become preoccupied with worries about having additional attacks, and in doing so, avoid any situations or places that might be causing the trouble.

Antianxiety drugs, such as Alprazolam have aided in the reduction of symptoms of GAS and panic disorder. Alprazolam is a benzodiazepene, which belongs to a group of medicines that work by slowing down the central nervous system, and in turn, relieves the feelings of anxiety and nervousness. The use of antianxiety drugs in combination with psychotherapy can dramatically improve the lives of individuals with anxiety disorders.

For more information on other mental health topics, go to our website at www.humanservicescenter.net

A public service message brought to you by:

