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Opinion Article

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Helping a Friend Coping with Anxiety

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Introduction

Anxiety

It is a normal reaction towards stress. Experiencing an Anxiety occasionally is normal part of life. For example sitting in an interview, first day at your new job, meeting your partner's family, or delivering speech in a crowd or giving presentation in front of a lot of people, etc.

It can be characterized by feeling of tension, worried thoughts, restlessness, distress, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.

Anxiety Disorder

When the feeling of anxiety and worry is constant and highly disruptive which makes hard to breathe, sleep, stay still, and concentrate, it becomes a disorder. It has been classified in 3 categories. 1) Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) 2) Panic Disorder (PD) 3) Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD).

People with anxiety disorder may feel scared or out-of-control and frequently experience intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear in about everyday situations that can affect their social circle, work life, or personal lives.

To avoid feeling of severe anxiety, people may avoid certain situations or environments like they may stop going for job interviews or social events.

Anxiety Disorder may also lead to health problems such as insomnia, chronic pain or digestive problems. It may also cause smoking and vaping habits in people with anxiety which may worsen health. Studies have also found that users of e-cigarette are twice as likely to suffer from depression, anxiety or other emotional conditions.

What Triggers Anxiety?

Genetics, Brain Chemistry and events of life are the major risk factors of anxiety. There are several reasons behind feeling anxious which includes work-related stress, financial issues, health conditions, drug usage, social relationships, trauma, etc. Facing difficult decisions or life changes may also trigger anxiety. Previous studies have found that anxiety disorder is more likely to occur in women than men.

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Coping with Anxiety

A person experiences anxiety, worrying about past or future events. So, it is required to take out a time and think about the exact reason that is making nervous. Regardless of the reason of worry, the reality behind this is that the person is not mindful of the present moment. So, any time when anxiety takes you out from the present state, you must regain your control by practicing a 5-4-3-2-1-Coping technique and bring yourself back to the present. This way anxiety loses its grip when we clear our mind of worry and come back to the present.

One must need to figure out what is bothering them. To get deeply to the source of anxiety, explore your thoughts and express your feelings either by writing in a notepad or sharing with a friend.

Coping Techniques

1. **Stress management:** To manage anxiety, one must regularly practice meditation or slow breathing exercises. 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique or other relaxation techniques such as yoga, Tai Chi also helps in relieving stress and reducing anxiety. Yoga will not stop the source of anxiety but would definitely help an individual in dealing better with the stress and anxiety.

2. **Guided imagery:** This practice can help when an individual feels anxious about a situation or task ahead. This technique involves imagining completing a task which is causing anxiety peacefully and successfully.

3. **Aromatherapy:** It is thought to help activate certain receptors in the brain, which may ease anxiety.

4. **Lifestyle Improvement:** A healthier lifestyle improves mental well-being of a person hence, proper balanced diet, regular exercise and good quality sleep is required to be maintained.

5. **Talking to someone:** As anxiety is caused from fearful thoughts, sitting silent may make it worse hence, in order to treat this disorder, sharing the cause of anxiety among friends, family members, or a therapist can be helpful.

Managing and Preventing Anxiety

1. To manage and prevent anxiety, one must focus on the present instead of worrying about the unknown future like what would happen if..?
   As life is unpredictable and is not in our control hence, one must try to accept the things, challenge the negative thoughts and focus on what can be controlled try to deal with them calmly. If a thought "What would happen if ?" still arises then one must decide how they are going to deal with the unknown. Being proactive may make you feel like you have a bit more control over your situation.

2. Focusing and engaging yourself in something other than your anxiety would be most helpful. One may choose to engage in watching funny movie, listening to music, praying, meditating or any enjoyable or creative activity, hobby or can reach out to others to clear the worry from mind.

3. As Alcohol and caffeine both can trigger anxiety and panic attacks, one must limit its intake.

4. Skipping meals can lead to low blood sugar which can trigger anxiety because the body produces more cortisol in response to the stress.

5. According to National Sleep Foundation, lack of sleep leads to anxiety disorders hence, adequate sleep is required for body to deal with the stress.

6. Enough Exercise improves sleep, releases endorphins which help in regulating a mood and improves response of a body to stress.

7. It is believed that you can break the anxiety cycle by taking mini breaks which would take the mind out of stressful moments and would increase productivity as well.

If anyone's anxiety becomes disruptive and the coping strategies are not working then they must see a doctor who can help evaluate the person's symptoms and refer to a mental health professional, if necessary.

CBT (Cognitive behavioral therapy) or group therapy or psychiatric medications can be suggested by a mental health professional as a treatment.

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