





Facing the Fear Factor

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#WellbeingWarriors



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“

***FEAR has two meanings:
Forget Everything and Run
or
Face Everything and Rise.
The choice is yours.
Zig Ziglar***

”

Are you familiar with those frequent flutters in your chest of a fast beating heart before a significant event? Do you experience the heavy breathing and sweating that fear induces? Anxiety is in fact something that we all experience. It is our bodies' normal reaction to fear inducing situations that all of us experience. Whether it be before an important test or speaking engagement, having a little bit of nervousness is normal.

Anxiety becomes a concern if it is all-consuming or interferes with your daily functioning. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) classifies a number of disorders under the anxiety umbrella; these include Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Panic disorders, Phobias, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The common ground of these disorders is the avoidance of the triggers of the fear- which disrupts one's daily functioning. The World Health Organisation (WHO) say that 264 million adults around the globe deal with anxiety; 63% being females and 37% being males.



Did you know?

Generalised Anxiety Disorder:

The experience of anxiety (with little to provoke it) on most days over a span of 6 months. It is characterized by restlessness, fatigue, difficulty focusing, irritability and difficulty sleeping in addition to excessive feelings of worry. These would be difficult to control to warrant this diagnosis.

Panic disorders:

Characterized by unexpected and repeated panic attacks (increased heart rate, shaking and trembling, sweating or chills and shortness of breath), often leading to an avoidance of certain situations or a constant worry of another panic attack occurring.

OCD:

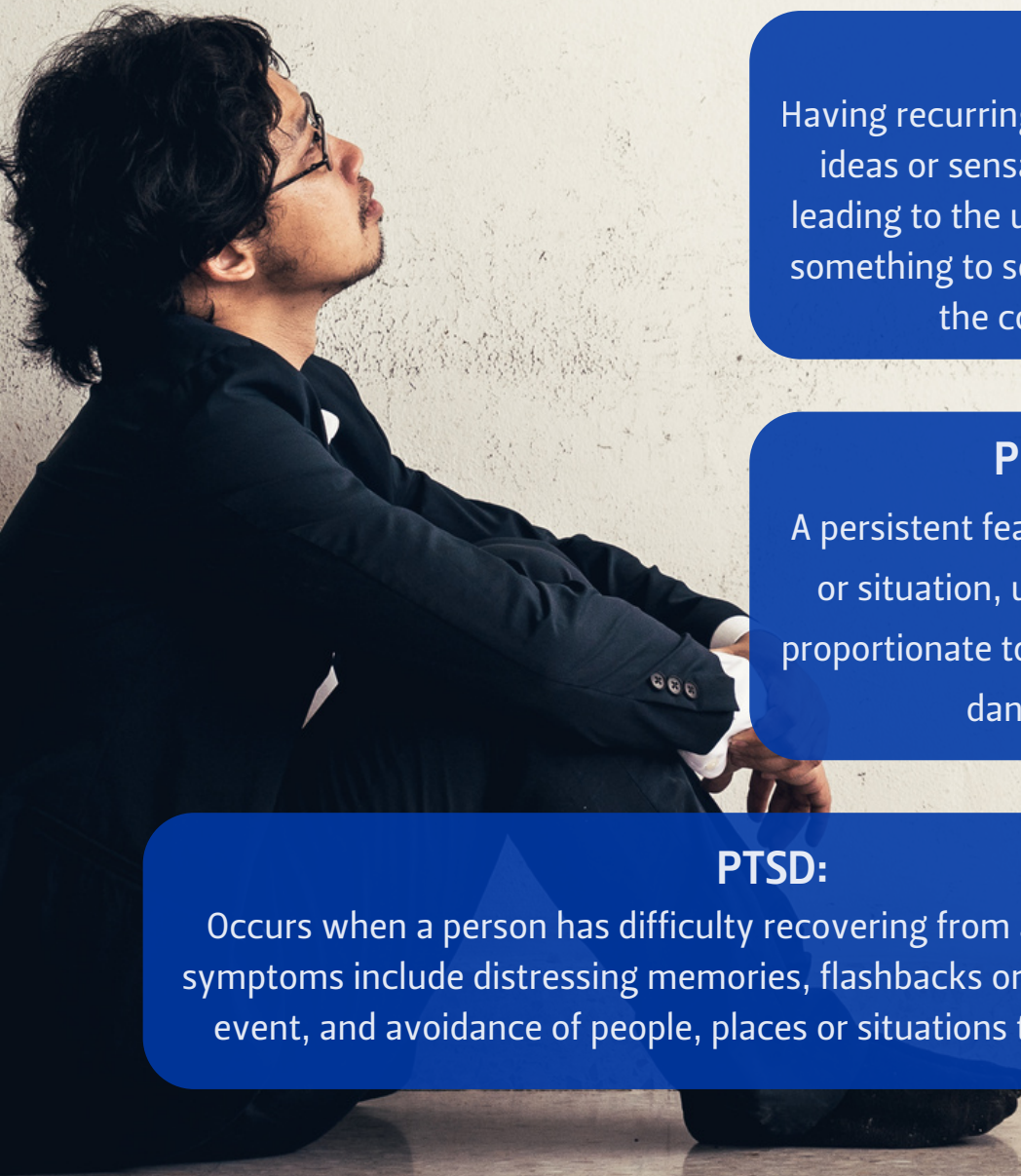
Having recurring unwanted thoughts, ideas or sensations (obsessions), leading to the urge to repetitively do something to solve them- which are the compulsions.

Phobia's:

A persistent fear of a particular object or situation, usually the fear is not proportionate to the actual (perceived) danger posed.

PTSD:

Occurs when a person has difficulty recovering from a traumatic incident; symptoms include distressing memories, flashbacks or nightmares about the event, and avoidance of people, places or situations that are related to it.





Anxiety disorders are highly treatable through therapy and medication. A therapeutic process in particular (like CBT) would serve to help one understand the thoughts and feelings related to the fear and how they influence one's behaviour.

In the absence of an anxiety disorder it is still common for your body to go into what is called fight or flight mode when you are afraid. It is in fact necessary for your survival. Your body needs your fight or flight response in order to kick in the actions and behaviours necessary to keep you safe and alive. However, in today's day and age there is far more that we perceive as a danger that may not necessarily be such.

It helps to understand the physiological process of anxiety in order to manage the experience. The racing heart or shallow breathing that you may experience when afraid, are as a result of stress hormones (cortisol and adrenalin) being pumped throughout your body by the amygdala (the part of your brain responsible for processing emotion and fear). This occurs through your hypothalamus which controls the sympathetic nervous system. The amygdala is part of the emotional brain, which overpowers the cognitive brain in this response. When threat is perceived your brain needs to focus all its attention on combating or protecting you from this threat.

It is important to note that your conscious mind, your cognitive part of your brain (the prefrontal cortex) is switched off during this process to focus all your brain's attention on helping you survive. Your conscious mind only kicks in once this fear response has already been activated. Essentially, your brain bypasses the prefrontal cortex in sending perceived information to the amygdala, this is why you may often feel your heart racing before having had a conscious thought of what you are afraid of.

Once your conscious brain is back, it is helpful to begin the process of challenging your threat-perceiving thoughts by testing the reality (for example- it was just a door slamming, or I know I can pass I have before). In the interim while your body has kicked in the physiological (bodily) functions, the following can help:

Deep breathing:

1

To calm your heart rate, take slow, consistent deep breaths. Counting can help in between each breath e.g., inhaling for 4 counts, holding for 4 counts and exhaling for 4 counts.

Grounding techniques

Use your 5 senses to ground yourself- taking in details that you can see, touch, smell, taste and hear. The 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method assists in focusing this. Count 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell and 1 that you can taste.

2



A decorative background on the left side of the page featuring a variety of fresh fruits including lemons, strawberries, and a sliced blood orange. There are also several Polaroid-style photographs scattered around, one showing a bowl of food and another showing a pair of scissors. The overall aesthetic is bright and natural.

3

Mindfulness

Although the above can fall under mindfulness techniques as well, another helpful mindfulness tool is the body scan. With the body scan you focus your attention in succession on different parts of your body. For example, starting at the tip of your head to the bottom of your feet. As you progress to each part of your body scan the sensations you may be feeling in that particular part and focus your attention on 'breathing into' it. Breathe deeply as you progress through your body.

4

Lifestyle changes:

The following are helpful tools to instigate as a lifestyle to help decrease your overall baseline of anxiety in your life.

Limiting caffeine

Caffeine can stimulate your body's flight or fight response. Research has also shown that it can trigger panic attacks. Try to reduce your amount of caffeine intake and rather reach for alternatives.

Exercise

Exercise has the tendency to release the feel-good hormones in your body that can counteract anxiety and help you more able to combat stress. Endorphins released through exercise improve mood and enhance overall wellbeing, relieving tension and stress and allowing for better sleep.

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Time management

Managing your time when it comes to your academics is an important way to manage stress and help ease your mind and body into stressful periods such as exam times. Plan in due time and be realistic in your daily goals so as to avoid overloading and overwhelming yourself with to-do's.

Thought management

Often our thoughts can induce anxiety. Be mindful of the thoughts you have that cause you to feel anxious. Recognise what is in your control and not, and distract yourself from the thoughts about things you cannot control. Reign in thoughts that catastrophise (exaggerate) a situation, and try to maintain realistic and rational thoughts. Our stress management workshop here, as well as our REBT program can teach you mechanisms in learning how to do so.

By being prepared to combat your anxiety you can overtime lower your overall baseline of anxiety susceptibility. Use these strategies to combat your anxiety and improve your overall anxiety and stress management.

