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Taking Control of Your Life

By M.D. Griffin

The Complete Guide to Understanding
and Treating Anxiety Disorders

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Table of Contents

Please Read This First	2
Terms of Use.....	2
Disclaimer	2
Table of Contents	4
1. Anxiety Disorders – An Introduction	9
Occurrences.....	9
The Different Types of Anxiety Disorders	12
Treatments	12
What is an Anxiety Disorder?.....	13
3. Why Do People Get Anxiety Disorders?.....	14
Types of Anxiety Disorders	17
Types of Anxiety Disorders.....	17
<i>Panic Disorder</i>	17
<i>Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)</i>	18
<i>Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)</i>	19
<i>Social Phobia</i>	19
<i>Specific Phobia</i>	20
<i>Generalized anxiety disorder</i>	20
Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders	21
Common Anxiety Disorder Signs and Symptoms	21
Panic Disorder	24
Symptoms of Panic Disorder	24
Diagnosis of Panic Disorder	25

<i>Is Treatment Necessary?</i>	25
Managing Panic	26
Social Anxiety Disorder	28
<i>Occurrence</i>	29
Treatment	29
<i>Cognitive-behavioral therapy</i>	29
Generalized Anxiety Disorder	32
<i>Symptoms</i>	32
<i>Diagnosis of the Disorder</i>	33
<i>Treatment Options</i>	33
<i>Prevention is a Better Option</i>	34
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder	35
Common Symptoms.....	35
Compulsive Rituals	36
<i>Treatments</i>	36
Specific Phobia.....	38
<i>Is Specific Phobia The Same as Fear?</i>	38
<i>How to Diagnose Your Specific Phobia</i>	39
Types of Specific Phobia	39
Treatment	40
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.....	42
<i>Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder</i>	42
<i>Treatment</i>	43
Self-Help	44
Agoraphobia	45
Diagnosis	45
<i>Symptoms of Agoraphobia</i>	45
<i>Treatment Options</i>	46
<i>Medications</i>	46

<i>Therapies</i>	46
<i>Psychodynamic Treatment</i>	47
Claustrophobia	48
Causes of Claustrophobia	48
<i>Symptoms of Claustrophobia</i>	49
<i>Treatment</i>	49
Anxiety Disorders in Children	51
<i>Occurrence</i>	51
<i>Types of Anxiety Disorders in Children</i>	52
<i>Treatments</i>	54
Recent Research on Anxiety Disorders	55
<i>Genes and Anxiety Disorders</i>	55
<i>Progress through Research</i>	56
How to Know If You Have an Anxiety Disorder	58
Diagnosis of the Disorder	58
How to Diagnosis Anxiety Disorders	60
Tests and Diagnosis.....	61
<i>Symptoms that may Indicate Your Particular Disorder</i>	61
18. Tips to Avoid Anxiety Disorders	63
Treatment Options for Anxiety Disorders	66
Treatment Options.....	67
Therapies.....	67
<i>Medications</i>	69
<i>Anti-Anxiety Drugs</i>	70
How to Make Treatment for Anxiety Disorders More Effective	72
Anxiety Disorder - The Recovery Process	75

Diagnosis	75
Acceptance	75
Treatment	76
Setbacks.....	76
Resolving	77
Natural Remedies to Treat Panic Attacks.....	78
Natural Remedies for Panic Attacks.....	78
<i>Herbs and Aromas.....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>Homeopathy.....</i>	<i>79</i>
Self-Help Techniques to Prevent or Cure Anxiety Disorders	80
Self-Help Techniques	80
<i>Support Groups.....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Self-Help Books.....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Optimism.....</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>Meditation.....</i>	<i>82</i>
Treating Anxiety Disorders with Herbs	84
Treating Anxiety Disorders with Vitamins and Supplements.....	88
Source of Vitamins	88
<i>Necessary Vitamins and Supplements</i>	<i>88</i>
The Impact of Anxiety Disorders	90
Impact on Your Family.....	90
Impact on Economy	91
Impact on Relationships.....	91
How to Cope with Anxiety Disorders.....	92
An Overview	92
<i>Factors That Help You to Cope with Anxiety Disorders.....</i>	<i>93</i>
How to Get Help for Anxiety Disorders	96

Ten Easy Ways to Boost Your Mood 98

Anxiety Disorders – Frequently Asked Questions 101

Part-I: Introduction

1. Anxiety Disorders – An Introduction

'Anxiety disorder' is a term that covers many different types of nervous conditions that cause anxiousness, feelings of fear or other unwanted, counterproductive or irrational feelings. These feelings of anxiety can be due to a particular phobia, to a particular event or happening earlier in life, or may be due to pathological (medical) uneasiness.

There may be no warning of the onset of your anxiety disorders. They can be sudden, or develop gradually over many years and such events are likely to cause profound disturbance of the sufferer's normal daily routine.

In the 21st Century, the occurrence of anxiety disorders is assuming alarming proportions.

They afflict more than forty million American adults. Many adolescents, and even children, also develop these disorders. Most patients are seriously affected, with the disorder(s) affecting them for several months, or even years.

You may suffer frequent bouts of fear, concern, or apprehension of some worrying event.

Occurrences

You may feel a short but severe period of anxiety, or the condition may be chronic with several periods that are less severe.

The disorder is likely to be connected with some earlier traumatic event in your life and cause nightmares, phobias or unwelcome thoughts that constantly flood your mind.

Sometimes, these anxiety spells may develop into an intense, on-going fear.

They can make you become a prisoner in your own home. You may not feel secure anywhere else, but staying in your own home, alone, may also terrify you.

You may be anxious about, or develop an intense fear of, darkness, night-time, looming events or bills, your health or the health of a loved one.

Anxiety can be acute or chronic. It can come in the form of be an acute, brief moment of anxiety – lasting from a few minutes to a few hours - or it can be a chronic, lifelong condition.

Brief anxiety spells often happen just *before* a special event, like a stage performance, examination, business presentation or 'the first date.'

These anxiety spells often end once you have passed the point of no return and begin the activity. The discomfort, anxiousness or fear might, however, stay with you until the event finishes. This type of acute attack is quite common.

Dwelling on what happened at an event, or events, in your life, to the extent that you experience acute moments of embarrassment or emotional pain, while alone or with others, for months or even years, is considered to be a chronic condition and a cause for

concern.

When these feelings get to the point that you can no longer keep them in perspective and they affect your ability to carry on a normal life, it is time to seek professional help.

Sometimes, anxiety disorders occur in combination with alcoholism, drug addiction or similar conditions, which may well mask the anxiety disorder. You may not realize it exists unless you seek help to you treat the condition.

Often, certain physical symptoms accompany anxiety disorders. You may feel pain in your chest, dizziness, headaches, a rapid pulse rate, trembling, muscular tension, fatigue and stomach disorders as well as fear of death or some other unfortunate happening.

These feelings can be very intense, and they might affect the way you think.

You may develop a phobia of something very ordinary and escalate it to such an alarming extent that you make others feel scared too. Regular or frequent occurrences of your disorder may lead to serious depression.

Sometimes, an anxiety disorder leads to other disorders. Anxiousness about food or eating, for instance, could also affect your sleep or even your ability to get along with others.

Sometimes, these disorders may be symptom of serious medical illnesses, like cancer or heart disease, and a warning for you to seek medical attention.

The Different Types of Anxiety Disorders

There are many different types of anxiety disorders, including Social phobia, Panic phobia, Agoraphobia, Generalized disorder, Post-traumatic-stress disorder, Compulsive and Obsessive disorders. Some could be present from a very young age, or they may start after an a severe trauma, such as war, rape, assault, child abuse or natural disasters, like floods and earthquakes.

Minor anxieties can become huge issues under heavy stress.

Treatments

There are innumerable therapies and treatments available for anxiety disorders. Certain drugs may help to provide some relief or even the possibility of a complete cure in some cases.

Some patients have had good results when the advice of their personal medical doctor was combined with various cognitive therapies (forms of psychotherapy that are based on the belief that the way we think may have a positive or negative effect on they way we feel and deal with our life experiences.)

You can become a stronger and more effective person by developing an optimistic attitude and learning to accept the tragedies of life.

Additional knowledge can be gathered from many different sources, like the Internet, books, magazines and journals.

Increasing your knowledge about your condition can be a very important factor in keeping most anxiety disorders at bay.

Part-II: Understanding Anxiety Disorders

What is an Anxiety Disorder?

The term 'anxiety disorder' covers a wide spectrum of different emotional feelings, including undue fear of an upcoming event, fear of the unknown, phobias or other pathological conditions where anxiety is the main emotion to the extent that it hinders the normal functioning of your life.

Anxiety disorders can occur suddenly or gradually over time. Sometimes, they occur with other serious ailments like heart disease, cancer and other neurological ailments.

There are many symptoms that often accompany an anxiety disorder. These symptoms include an increased pulse rate, higher blood pressure, nausea, gastro-intestinal disorders, fatigue, headaches, dizziness, restlessness and agitation.

3. Why Do People Get Anxiety Disorders?

Many factors may contribute to the occurrence of anxiety disorders. There is not just one cause for all anxiety disorders. They may occur as the result of a combination of many different factors.

Those factors may include:

Childhood events: Disturbing and traumatic events in childhood, such as child abuse, loss of parents, separation from family, accident or illness, can leave a lasting effect on the mind. Even having been bullied, embarrassed, or made fun of at school can produce lasting anxieties that manifest into a serious anxiety disorder later in life. Most children are bullied or teased at times during their school years and most of them grow up without developing anxiety disorders from those experiences while others can be very traumatized.

Genetic: Parents with anxiety disorder can pass it on to, or cause their children to be more likely to suffer from this type of condition, because of genetic factors or the environment that they provide in the family home.

Some families have a history of, or predominance of anxiousness or depression, or both.

Stress and Trauma: Stressful, traumatic events can contribute to anxiety disorders. Domestic violence, rape (or other forms of sexual molestation), physical assault, death of a family member or loss due to natural disasters like floods or earthquakes, leaves a person

feeling helpless. This feeling of powerlessness leads to fear and resultant anxiousness.

Sometimes, the anxiety associated with social traumas (loss of job, divorce, not being able to find employment, financial problems), can be even more devastating and debilitating than random violence or natural disaster, due to its internalization.

Substance abuse: Alcoholism and drug addiction may contribute to anxiety disorders in some people. And, not surprisingly, most alcoholics and drug addicts had some sort of disorder before they became addicted. The addictive substance was a coping mechanism for a time against the anxious, out of control feelings.

Medical ailments: Certain disorders, like eating or sleeping disorders, depression and other nervous ailments, may contribute to more anxiety disorders, and possible medical problems. These disorders do not allow the body to function normally. Without proper sleep or nutrition, anyone is likely to become very anxious. Similar intense feelings are caused by flood, violence, or social disaster and even an eating disorder, where someone might gain, say, 100 pounds in a year and get anxious or depressed because of the effects on their health, social life and self-esteem.

Personality: Whether a person is born with low self-esteem or develops it in later life, they are likely to become anxious. This effect is also likely to happen if you have poor self confidence, an incapacity for tackling simple problems, jealousy or envy.

Social and Economic Issues: Believe it or not, the rich are not immune to anxiety, peer pressure and stress. Life is stressful at all levels of human society. Being poor gives you may put more

pressure on you – just to survive and try to improve your situation for yourself and your family.

But, wealth does not endow anyone with an immunity to worry. There are the same health and social pressures, probably greater pressure on them in their work and, instead of worries of paying the bills are the concerns about whether people really like them (or just their money) and the, possibly baseless, fear of what they could do if they lost their wealth. No one is immune unless they focus on remaining positive!

Brain abnormalities: Medications prescribed to alleviate symptoms of some ailments can sometimes affect the chemical balance in the brain and cause an anxiety disorder.

Allergic reactions to certain medicines might also lead to an anxiety disorder. Serotonin and dopamine are two important neurotransmitters of the brain. Anything that may cause imbalances in their normal levels may sometimes lead to an increase in anxiety and restlessness.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders can have different symptoms accompanying them. Some symptoms that are common to **all types** of anxiety disorders are a debilitating fear of something real, whether past present or future, or imagined. This becomes the main cause of that anxiety disorder. More women than men suffer anxiety disorders.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

Panic Disorder

Someone can be said to have the full anxiety disorder, rather than just maybe suffering isolated incidents that we all encounter at some time, where attacks are repeated, unexpected and cause the sufferer to have an extended period (say a month or more) of worry about the consequences and implications of the attack or the possibility of it recurring or to change their behavior because of the attack.

Common symptoms include weakness, sweatiness, nausea, dizziness, chilly hands, rapid pulse and numbness. Repeated occurrences may cause you to alter your routine, or avoid situations or places that are associated with your anxiety and lead to more serious crises.

With this disorder, one may become paranoid about the factors which brought, to the extent that you can't stop thinking about it. That negative focus ensures continual anxiety, loss of sleep, decrease of appetite (or eating binges) and a greater possibility of another panic attack.

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