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INcontrol

What is Anxiety?

Everyone has anxiety. Having anxiety means feeling worried or nervous. Anxiety is a normal reaction to stressful things that happen in life. Having some anxiety can be a good thing. Anxiety gives us extra energy and focus. Changes happen in our brains and bodies that make us feel more energized and more alert. Extra energy and focus can help us take action to make changes that help with stress.

The reaction in our brains and bodies is something that happens naturally to help keep us safe in dangerous situations. You might have heard this called "the fight or flight response". In dangerous situations our bodies prepare us to get ready to fight or get ready to run … literally for our lives! You can imagine how in early times this helped people survive. People often were in life threatening situations hundreds of years ago. Most of us today though do not have things that threaten our lives on a daily basis.

Anxiety becomes a problem when our brains and bodies act like our life is in danger in everyday stressful situations. The reaction is much stronger than it needs to be because most stresses don't threaten our lives. When a person reacts to stress like it is life-threatening most of the time, they may have an anxiety disorder.

There are several different kinds of anxiety disorders. Some of the symptoms people may have include:

- Having constant worries about all kinds of different things.
- Having problems sleeping.
- Getting stomachaches or headaches.
- Feeling tightness in their muscles.
- Feeling numbness or a sense that they are out of their bodies.
- Feeling like things around them aren't real.
- Feeling like they are unable to speak or remember things.
- Feeling panic like they can't breathe or are going to die.

To help when these feelings happen, people with anxiety disorder may:

- Avoid situations or people that seem frightening.
- Repeat certain behaviors or thoughts over and over as a way of stopping bad things from happening.
- Refuse to go to public places or be around a lot of people.

Doctors may say that a person has an anxiety disorder if the anxiety:

- Seem stronger than it should be for the situation.
- Lasts for a long time after a frightening thing happens.
- Interferes with school, work or family relations.
- Makes a person feel sick all of the time.

What can I do if I think I might have an anxiety disorder?

Talk to your doctor. Anxiety is very treatable. Your doctor can give you medicine or help you find a counselor to work with.

How is anxiety treated?

- Your doctor will make a treatment plan with you.
- Counseling has been shown to be helpful in treating anxiety.
- There are medicines your doctor can give you to help with anxiety.

What can I do to help myself with anxiety?

- Take slow, deep breaths.
- Use calm "self talk." Tell yourself to breathe and calm down.
- Ask yourself questions about how likely it is that a bad thing will happen.
- Ask yourself if a situation will really matter that much 6 months from now.
- Try and replace worried thoughts with thoughts that are less scary.
- Remind yourself that you cannot die from feelings of panic.
- Exercise.

Compiled from the following sources:
National Anxiety Foundation:
http://www.nationalanxietyfoundation.org/naf.html
NIMH:
https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml