



Lifeline

anxiety disorder newsletter

A quarterly newsletter for people – and the families of people – who suffer from the panic brought about by fears, anxieties and phobias.

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Left brain– worry; right brain– panic

A University of Illinois research team has proved that all anxiety is not equal, biologically supporting the contention that there are psychological differences in types of anxiety. They found evidence of differing patterns of brain activity between the anxious apprehension, which results in worry and fretting, and anxious arousal, i.e. intense fear and/or panic. Undergraduate college students were categorized, using psychological testing as 'high anxious apprehension', 'high anxious arousal' or neither and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) was used to map the brain areas with heightened neural activity during a variety of psychological probes. Left-brain activity – predominantly increased activity in a region of the left inferior frontal lobe, which is associated with the production of speech, explaining continual verbal worrying – proved to be enhanced in the 'anxious apprehension' group. The 'anxious arousal' group showed heightened activity in the right brain, exhibiting more action in a region of the right-hemisphere inferior temporal lobe which is believed to be involved in tracking and responding to information signaling danger. Electroencephalograms (EEG) showed heightened activity in the left brain of patients diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder while patients with panic disorder and those involved in high stress situations exhibited enhanced activity in the right hemisphere. Whether anxiety is treated psychologically or biologically, the psychology and the biology of the patient is affected. The research, therefore, shows the importance of thorough patient assessment prior to beginning treatment.

The material included in this newsletter is for general information and discussion purposes only and should not replace or be regarded as clinically recommended treatment. Subscriptions are free, but a \$5.00 fee should be submitted to cover the postage and handling costs of 4 quarterly issues per year.

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The current issue is always available for viewing or download from our website at: <http://www.designandcopy.ca/lifeline>.

Out of the shadows...

The recommendations in *Out of the Shadows at Last*, last year's report on mental health and addictions in Canada from the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, will be the basis for the national mental health commission announced in the federal government's budget speech.

The commission's mandate will be to lead the development of a national mental health strategy. It will receive \$10 million over the next two years and \$15 million per year after that and will be chaired by Michael Kirby, who chaired the Standing Senate Committee and is currently Chairman of the Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health. After the announcement Mr. Kirby told the media that the Commission is a necessary first step to bring mental illness out of the shadows – forever and that the goal will be nothing less. The Commission will be headquartered in Calgary and the start-up priorities are:

- Stigma reduction
- Creation of a national Knowledge Exchange Centre
- Aboriginal mental health
- Children's mental health
- Workplace mental health.

Mental Health Week promoted work-life balance with the theme *Work/Life Balance: It's a Matter of Time*, profiling the necessity to take care of both our physical and mental well-being, and the concurrent Children's Mental Health Week profiled the need for parents, teachers, government agencies and kids themselves to talk about how society can better support children and youth suffering from mental illness. One in five children and young people struggle with mental health issues yet, according to a nation-wide telephone survey of 1,500 adults, mention of children's mental health is still taboo in Canada. More than one-third of the survey participants said they would be embarrassed to admit that their children suffer from anxiety or depression, a situation to which Michael Kirby, who has already, through the Roundtable, initiated changes to similar attitudes in the workplace, will now be able to bring change.

Trapped by Anxiety & Fear? How To Find The Fun Again!

by James Warner

Have you ever felt like you were trapped in a cycle of fear, something over which you thought you had no control? You just felt fearful and anxious; your heart racing for no apparent reason, a burning feeling in your spine, a churning in your stomach and you just wanted your Doctor to give you a magic pill solve it.

It all feels so physical doesn't it? You can get a pill for a headache, another physical pain, which most times works really well, so why not a pill to take away anxiety and fear?

Well, of course, you may say, there are plenty of pills. Tranquilizers, particularly the benzodiazepines, of which Valium (diazepam) is one of the most common, which can make you feel more relaxed. Unfortunately they wear off and afterwards you are back where you started, perhaps also with a muzzy head... Great! Anti-depressants – if you are lucky enough to find the right one for you amongst the huge array of SSRIs, MAOIs, Tricyclics and others – can have a dramatic effect on your mood and may well redress the brain chemistry sufficiently for you to feel almost anxious free and, in some more acute cases, are a necessity. However, does any body want to offer a guarantee on the side effects of these drugs over long periods?

So what about life after drugs – nobody wants to be on drugs for the rest of their lives, and anyway aren't these medications just treating the symptoms not the cause?

Do you find yourself thinking a lot about your symptoms, what you are feeling, and wondering why – trying to figure out what could be the cause, perhaps some tumour, heart or other organ defect? Do you run the thoughts around in your mind again and again? Anything negative you read in the papers, hear on the radio or see on television that relates to how you feel, do you immediately adopt it as a possibility? The answer is probably mostly yes because you are on defence alert level #1 – constant fear. Everything and anything is a possible threat.

How does that make you feel - more anxious, and more fearful? This fear loop accelerates and expands until eventually something gives and more often this only needs a further stressful trigger, such as a difficult journey to work or a long queue at the supermarket, and it leads to a full blown anxiety or panic attack.

This is a vicious loop caused by over-focusing on yourself and the fearful symptoms you feel. Your nerves are already over-sensitised and by focusing on negative and fearful things that is exactly how you will feel – more fearful and anxious.

Seems obvious doesn't it? So why do we do it? We focus on all this negative stuff to desperately try to understand a solution. The irony is that all this negative

thinking, or focus, on what is wrong is in itself keeping us there. What you think about is what you feel.

So try this. Think about one of the most embarrassing things you can think of that has happened to you. Did you ever say something about someone and they were right behind you? Think about it now. Do you feel like cringing at the thought? You have recreated the thought in your mind and you relive the awful embarrassment again. This is the same thing with anxiety. The more you keep thinking about it the more you feel the symptoms of anxiety. Many anxiety sufferers do this to such an extent they become so damn good at it that they create the symptoms most of the time!

Now try thinking about one of the best moments of your life; a special love, winning a sports event, gaining an award, or where other people complimented you on an achievement. Recreate the thought and memory in your mind and run it through like a movie in your mind's eye.

How does that feel? Do you get the same sense of well being through your body as you rethink about that happy event as if it had just happened? Do you now feel more calm and relaxed?

So it's important to keep in mind that what we think about has a huge impact on what and how we feel.

All this time spent thinking about your symptoms, anxiety, what is wrong with you, and when you may recover, is preventing you from thinking about the fun things in life you want to do and enjoy.

You may initially say that in the midst of anxiety, and possibly depression as well, that you just don't feel like thinking of fun. You aren't in the mood. Fun things just don't appeal any more.

Well bear in mind that you have been 24/7 thinking negatively, so it may take some effort at first to change your habits from thinking about anxiety to thinking about fun. However, it probably took you some time of permanent negative thinking to get you into this fear cycle you are experiencing.

So get to it and put the same effort into thinking about fun whenever a negative thought pops into your mind. It's OK to let your anxious symptoms run along side, just don't think about them, and don't dwell on them. Accept them and then think about fun.

Before long your anxiety will begin to ease. If you keep at this for a sustained period you can look forward to a new dawn. As you rise above the ruts created by the anxiety and into the daylight, you will at last recover the zest for life and rediscover where all the fun had gone.

James Warner is the author of a best-selling guide on curing anxiety and panic attacks – available at www.CureAnxietyAndPanicAttacks.com All rights in this article are reserved. Copyright 2006 The Gallery Ltd.

From one reader to another...

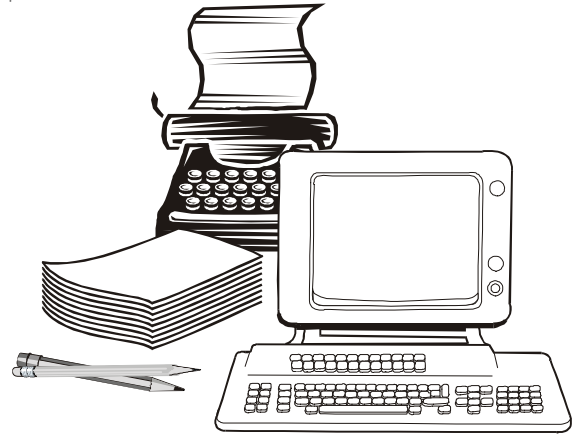
Quick-Fix

She wanted to stop having panic attacks. She wanted it right now. She wanted a job, a friend, a husband. She didn't want to hear that recovery is a process, not an event. Carol had been experiencing panic attacks with agoraphobia since she was a teenager and, now in her thirties, she was practically housebound. Her therapist had told her that I was leading an anxiety support group, and Carol asked that I be given her phone number. It was quickly arranged, and my first call with Carol lasted an hour. She asked how I had gone from being housebound to driving across town to speak in front of strangers.

She sure didn't like my answer. I told her that I took very small steps. My first drive was around the block. I used the analogy of teaching someone to swim. The first lesson is wading into the shallow end of the pool, learning to tread water. It takes many lessons to become an accomplished swimmer. Carol said she didn't have the patience for that approach.

After my stunned silence, I responded by describing a technique called 'flooding' which exposes someone suddenly and completely to a feared situation. For example, if you are afraid to go into stores, you are taken to the middle of a huge busy store and told to remain there. You feel flooded with panic. The idea is that eventually the panic lets up, and you realize that you didn't die. Supposedly, you are then no longer afraid of shopping in huge stores. In my swimming analogy, this would compare to being thrown in the deep end of the pool at your first lesson. Carol said that she was more of a depend type of person. I countered by saying that I believed this technique would have made me worse. 'Flooding' seemed more like 'drowning' to me.

I felt that I had not convinced her of the benefits of progressive desensitization, of gradually approaching places she feared going. She was so angry. I didn't blame her. Carol had gone to several psychiatrists. She had tried many medications, only to find that the side effects were intolerable. Now my message to her sounded too simple to believe and yet too hard to bear. I tried to encourage her by saying that having a plan in itself would lower her general level of anxiety. She could take small steps and only move to the next level when she was comfortable. She realized from what I had told her that my agoraphobia had been as severe as hers. When she was telling me her story, I was able to finish some of her



sentences. She knew I hadn't read about panic disorder in a book; I had lived it. I was still living it but doing the things comfortably that she felt she would never do with ease.

As our conversation continued, I could tell that Carol was as surprised by my attitude as I was by hers. Because she seldom left her house, she said she spent a lot of time on the internet. In spite of what was available online, she had very little contact with other people with panic disorder. She certainly hadn't met other people who shared my philosophy concerning recovery. She was left with the belief that she had to choose between forcing herself into terrifying situations or being housebound. She quoted a psychiatrist who told her, 'just do it', meaning just go to all the places she feared. All I could do was sigh.

I certainly do not have all the answers to recovering from panic disorder, but I know what helps me and what hurts me. Feeling pressured makes my anxiety increase. My goal isn't just to survive an outing, it is to be calm and, ultimately, to be happy doing all kinds of activities. To do this means putting in a lot of time visiting the same place until I can confidently move to a more difficult destination. Of course it is hard to be patient when, like Carol, you feel that life is passing you by. But I challenged her to show me how she could make better use of her time than to put it towards her recovery. I wish I could have given her the quick-fix she wanted.

Colette Carner.

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Never lose hope in dealing with your fears and depression

By: Stanley Popovich

When your fears and depression have the best of you, it's easy to feel that things will never get any better. This is not true. There is a multitude of help available today and many effective ways to overcome your fears and anxieties. Here are some techniques.

- Challenge your negative thinking with positive statements and realistic thinking. When encountering thoughts that make you feel fearful or depressed, challenge those thoughts by asking yourself questions that will maintain objectivity and common sense. For example, you're afraid that if you do not get that job promotion, then you will be stuck at your job forever. This depresses you but the fact of the matter is that there all are kinds of jobs available and just because you don't get this job promotion doesn't mean that you will never get one. People change jobs all the time, and you always have that option of going elsewhere if you are unhappy at your present location.

- You may get depressed and have a difficult time getting out of bed in the mornings. When this happens, take a deep breath and try to find something to do to get your mind off the problem. Walk, listen to some music,

read the newspaper or do an activity that will give them a fresh perspective on things. Doing something will get your mind off the problem and give you confidence to get on with other things.

- Be smart in dealing with your anxiety – do not try to tackle everything at once. When facing a current or upcoming task that overwhelms you with a lot of anxiety, break the task into a series of smaller steps. Completing these smaller tasks one at a time will make the stress more manageable and increase your chances of success.

- Take advantage of the help that is available around you. If possible, talk to a professional and get additional advice and insights on dealing with the problem. By talking to a professional, you will be helping yourself in the longer term because you will learn how to better deal with the problem in the future.

Managing your fears and anxieties takes practice. The more you practice, the better you will become.

Stan Popovich is the author of "A Layman's Guide to Managing Fear Using Psychology, Christianity and Non Resistant Methods" - an easy to read book that presents a general overview of techniques that are effective in managing persistent fears and anxieties. For additional information go to: <http://www.managingfear.com/>

Eat away anxiety before it eats away at you!

Some anxiety-reducing ideas to bear in mind during diet planning are:

- Carbohydrate-rich meals and snacks appear to increase the amount of serotonin in your brain. (Serotonin is the brain chemical which has a calming effect).

- Milk, bananas, oats, cheese, soy, poultry and nuts are all foods that contain tryptophan, the amino acid which your body converts to serotonin.

- Too long a time between meals or skipping meals altogether may result in low blood sugar, causing nervousness, irritability and even trembling.

- Prevent a sudden drop in blood sugar by eating complex carbohydrates (starches,) which take longer to metabolize than simple carbohydrates (sugars).

- Drinking plenty of water prevents dehydration which can increase anxiety levels.

- Alcohol can cause anxiety symptoms as it is metabolized and caffeine causes nervousness, so both should be limited.

And, get that extra weight off, too...

Obese people are about 25% more likely to have a mood or anxiety disorder according to a study of 9,000

American adults. Those with a body mass index (BMI) of more than 30 had a far greater susceptibility to major depression, bipolar disorder, panic disorder and agoraphobia.

Studies in the UK, conducted by weight loss organizations, found that participants starting their programs with low ratings of well-being compared to the general population, experienced significant improvement in their well-being and calmness and increased energy and self-confidence. A Police Authority employee program reported 76% feeling generally healthier and 24% were less anxious and depressed.

Whether the treatment selected for controlling an anxiety disorder is psychological, cognitive, pharmacological or any combination of them, the right diet can spell the difference between success and failure. It's imperative to understand the importance of good nutrition, exercise and such calming activities as yoga and tai chi in getting your body to respond to the treatment. The old saying, 'you are what you eat', is very true in this regard. Look at any of the items on the list and you'll see that they are all targeted to ensuring that treatment is supported by a calm and positive state of mind.