



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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Improved criteria for diagnosis called for in 2012 DSM

It was announced, a few weeks ago, that the American Psychiatric Association would update the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Scheduled for 2012, the fifth edition, will include newly defined mental illnesses and refine some of the existing ones.

The most radical changes to diagnoses were seen in the 1980 edition of the DSM which categorized illnesses based on the number of the classic symptoms experienced over a certain period of time, as opposed to the previous method of basing them on Freudian psychoanalytic principles. Causes were not specified and we are still no

closer, today, to relating the recognized manifestations of any mental health disorder to its underlying cause.

While the diagnostic checklist system was an improvement, many mental health professionals feel that diagnoses sometimes fall short because the severity of the recognized symptoms is not weighted. They favour a system of high scoring on extreme symptoms, i.e. suicidal thinking or immobilizing fear or depression, so that patients with fewer than the number of symptoms required to meet DSM criteria are not excluded from a diagnosis and the subsequent treatment that may well save their lives.

A diagnosis with a biological basis

The blood test being developed, at the University of Iowa College of Medicine, will enable doctors to determine whether a patient has panic disorder biologically as opposed to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) descriptive diagnosis currently used. A diagnosis with a biological basis will result in conclusive evidence of the disorder and assist in changing the attitude of many people, including many medical professionals, who still see it as a character weakness.

The steep price of the test, once it becomes available, will deter its use to a large extent but when life-threatening diseases need to be ruled out, taking this step first could save a lot of other costly testing. And just having credibility may make it worth the money for the many people who sink into depression, become agoraphobic or develop a drinking problem due to the 'Get over it' attitude of their doctors and families. This shouldn't be so, of course, but, let's face it, it is often the case.

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

Mental Illness Awareness Week

Co-ordinated by the Canadian Alliance of Mental Illness and Mental Health, Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) begins on September 30th in Canada. The 'Face Mental Illness' theme of recent years continues this year with four new 'Faces' – courageous, inspiring individuals – sharing their stories and helping to bring mental illness out from the shadows. The Fifth Annual Champions of Mental Health Awards, honouring individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to advancing the mental health agenda in Canada, will be held in Ottawa on October 3rd.

In the US, MIAW gets underway the following week and the theme is 'Building Community, Taking Action'. Bipolar Disorder Awareness Day is on October 4th and a National Day of Prayer for Mental Illness Recovery and Understanding will take place on October 9th. The National Alliance on Mental Illness co-ordinates MIAW.

National and community events, activities and free anxiety and depression screenings will be taking place throughout North America during these two weeks.

Set by the World Federation for World Mental Health Day, this year's theme for World Mental Health Day, celebrated annually on October 10th since 1992 and recognized around the world, is 'Mental health in a changing world: the impact of culture and diversity'.

A secure self-image will help you face down your fears; control your panic

One of the great authorities on the development of self-confidence was Dale Carnegie. In his book, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, he said, *"The more I have studied the careers of men of achievement, the more deeply I have been convinced that a surprisingly large number of them succeeded because they started with handicaps that spurred them on to great endeavour and great rewards."*

Well, you may not necessarily expect to become capable of any great endeavour or be looking for great rewards. A life relatively free from anxiety symptoms will do just as well, I know. The point is that you can either allow a handicap to destroy any possibility of happiness you may have or you can achieve the freedom to use the skills you develop, in taking control of your problems, to go wherever you want to go. It all comes down to how you see yourself – what sort of self-image you have.

Your self-image has evolved from the myriad of beliefs about yourself that you have developed over your lifetime. You began to acquire these beliefs back in early childhood as you were consistently told that you were a 'good girl', a 'bad boy', a 'stupid kid' or 'just like Daddy', etc. The beliefs about yourself that you developed during your growing years are the ones which most deeply affect your self-image. If being 'just like Daddy' meant being an introvert or compulsively tidy to your extroverted or disorganised mother, she could, unintentionally, have put you on the road to social phobia or obsessive compulsive disorder. Self-image can be changed, however.

A secure self-image won't magically turn you into a non-anxious person brimming with self-confidence; instead, it will release all those confidence-creating abilities that you didn't know you had. Its development does not come from a miraculous transformation process either, but rather from realization of self; you are really far wiser, stronger, lovable and competent than you think you are. Building your self-image means also admitting to imperfection; accepting the fact that you can never be perfect. You must recognize your abilities and faults and accept yourself as you are. Then, work from there.

Respect yourself. Don't confuse giving yourself due regard with conceit. When you don't give yourself the respect you've truly earned, you are denying what is rightfully yours. You are, in fact, an incredibly brave person. You constantly survive fearful attacks of panic, don't you? Perhaps you participate in exposure therapy which takes great courage. Giving yourself respect is the foundation of your more productive, more creative self-image, so don't sell yourself short.

Put failure behind you. Everyone of us, at some point, experiences something that convinces him/her that he/she does not have the ability to succeed in some area. Usually this is a complete misconception. You can either accept this failure just as a part of yourself, one of many things that made you the way you are, or you can continually dwell on it and allow the feeling of failure to creep into every part of your life because the more you think you're a failure, the more of a failure you'll become. By the same token, the more successful you think you are, the more successful you'll become. Remember the story of the little engine read to you as a child, maybe read by you to your children - *"I think I can, I think I can, I think I can."* You can when you think you can!

Never mind the mistakes. Mistakes are only alternative ways of doing things. So long as you learn from them, they can become stepping stones along the way to building your self-image. Hide from them and you'll never get your aspirations off the ground.

Hopefully, you are convinced by now that you can start improving your self-image and using it to face down your worry, anxiety and panic. Some fifty years ago a plastic surgeon named Dr. Maxwell Maltz discovered that many people seeking plastic surgery really didn't need it. Their problem was not their outward appearance; it was their poor self-image. He created psycho-cybernetics and put them on the road to changing their perceptions about themselves by setting goals, and achieving fulfilment through realizing them.

An anxiety/panic disorder can be viewed in much the same way. Understand that the way you react to anxiety is entirely consistent with your self image and you can you can begin to take the steps towards having your self-image govern your reactions. Love yourself; cultivate the things that make you feel good about yourself. Saying hello to that neighbour, instead of pretending you didn't see her, made you feel good, didn't it? Or, going into the shopping mall, despite panicky symptoms and not being able to stay very long, was an achievement. Right? That's it – developing a secure self-image means competing with yourself, not measuring yourself against other people. Understand this and your failures will no longer feel like failures because you will see the small improvement instead of the poise and confidence of what seems like everybody else around you although, of course, it isn't – a whole 95% of the population feels inferior at some point. That's a fact. Know yourself. Accept yourself. Dwell on your small successes and they'll eventually grow into bigger ones.

From one reader to another...

Generalizations

In school, I remember being taught not to make generalizations. It might have been as far back as third or fourth grade, but the lesson really stuck with me. Generalizations were plainly wrong. So, I shouldn't make generalizations about people with panic disorder. But I want to because they seem to have more in common than just panic attacks. I've found that the ones I've met share a whole set of characteristics. And, yes, I'm also describing myself.

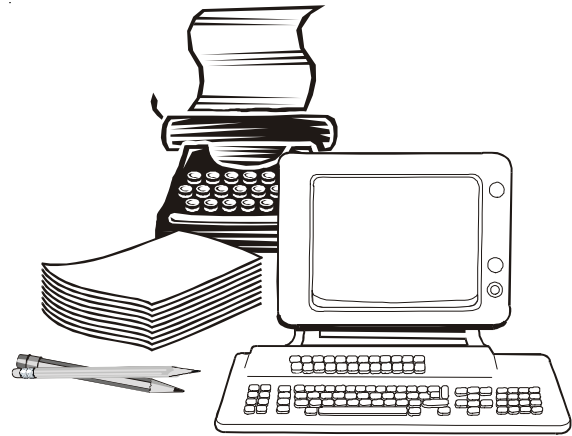
Those of us who have panic attacks analyze everything. We really pick apart a problem. When we are thrown into a new situation or are forced to make a difficult decision, all aspects must be examined. Then we look at every possible outcome or consequence, dwelling on the most negative ones. This process is tiring and endless. To us, other people seem capable of making choices fairly quickly, feeling at ease with their decisions, and moving on. We get stuck. We become anxious. Then, we feel guilty because we're anxious.

Maybe we analyze so carefully because we are seeking certainty. Panic attacks are often described as coming 'out of the blue'. If we prepare, selecting several escape routes, we imagine that we can avoid these terrible surprise attacks. Naturally, we are worriers. We need control. We resist change because change means uncertainty.

Most of the time, other people are not aware of our distress. People with panic disorder work very hard at appearing completely at ease. We hope to present a calm and pleasant image. The 'pleasant' part is very important. All negative emotions are off-limits. The term 'people pleasers' fits us. In fact, we have a strong desire to please everyone. This impossible task increases our stress.

Ironically, we are the ones other people come to for advice and for comfort. Because of our experiences, we understand what it is to suffer. We are compassionate. We don't judge other people the way we judge ourselves. We have a low opinion of our abilities. We don't see our talents at all, while our limitations glow in the dark.

Because we view ourselves in such a negative light, we are vulnerable to criticism from others. Every word is a weapon. Every arrow hits its mark. We are unable to defend ourselves. If the suggestion is that we don't measure up to the usual standard, we are quick to inwardly agree.



One of the best ways to counter all this negativity is to be open to people who have similar fears. After I reveal my problems with anxiety, people often share their life stories. Sometimes I feel honored to hear that they have never told anyone about their panic attacks but, saddened, too. Carrying this secret can be a lonely burden. As I tell them that I have also been afraid of socializing at parties or driving over bridges, they are so relieved.

I usually take the opportunity to mention my problem with loud noise. I startle easily but that isn't really my concern with noise. If I am in an environment where there is a lot of background sound, I may become anxious. In a jammed restaurant I thought, at first, that I was reacting because of my fear of crowds. When a nearly empty restaurant with music blaring caused the same discomfort, I realized that the noise was a factor in itself. Loud sounds can be almost physically painful to me. Other phobics know immediately what I mean.

Sometimes I'm asked if we aren't just overly sensitive people. Calling us 'sensitive' is certainly accurate. But there is a significant difference. A sensitive person might worry about what to say to the person next to her at a dinner party. A person with panic disorder would worry about having a panic attack before or during dinner. This level of anxiety impacts daily life. Panic attacks can scare you into a different life, one that other anxious people generally recognize as their own.

Colette Carner.

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Do not let your fears overcome your self-confidence

By: Stanley Popovich

Some people have a difficult time in managing their anxieties and fears; self-esteem and self-confidence suffer. You can, however, manage your fears without decreasing your self-confidence.

Remember that practice makes perfect. Whenever it comes to dealing with your anxieties or any other task, the name of the game is *practice, patience, and persistence*. If you don't get the desired results the first time around, keep trying until you do. Through practice, you will become better at the task at hand and your self-confidence will increase.

Write down a list of things you are thankful for in this world, i.e good health, a good marriage, lots of friends, being smart and resourceful, and a good education. Whenever you get discouraged, take out your list and focus on the things that make you happy. This technique will make you feel better and give you encouragement.

When you get anxious about a task which you are going to have to perform in the near future, visualize yourself doing it. For instance, you and your team have to play in the championship game in front of a large

group of people in the next few days. Before the big day comes, imagine yourself playing the game in your mind. See yourself playing in front of a large audience. By playing the game in your mind, you will be better prepared to perform for real when the time comes. Visualization is a great way to reduce the fear and stress of a coming situation and increase your self-confidence.

Learn what works and what you need to improve on in managing your fears and anxieties. If you find taking a walk helps you when you feel anxious, remind yourself of this and it will give you the confidence to manage your anxiety the next time around.

Take things one day at a time. Instead of worrying about how you will get through the rest of the week, try to focus on today. Each day can provide you with different opportunities to learn new things and that includes learning how to deal with your problems.

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/>

Professionally guided self-help treatment is the wave of the future

Because mental health services around the world are most often unable to meet the demand for treatment, newer options, focusing on professionally guided self-help programs of various kinds, are creating considerable interest from both the consumer and the professional viewpoint. In addition to proving useful for people who would otherwise be placed on long waiting lists, they also allow mental health professionals time to work with people who need more individual treatment.

Evaluation of most professionally guided self-help programs is proving them to be as effective as the traditional therapist-run programs upon which they are based. A recent comparison done in Australia of four treatments for severe social phobia – standard group therapy, self-help alone, guided self-help and a control group on a waitlist – determined that while self-help alone had limited effect, the same program with minimal therapist guidance was as effective as the standard intensive group therapy. The programs were, as in most cases now, cognitive behavioural therapy-based and this treatment is proving key to the success of self-help programs, both with and without professional guidance.

In the UK, an extensively tested computerized cognitive

behavioural therapy (cCBT), *FearFighter™*, is approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and endorsed and has been implemented by the National Health Service to provide faster access to treatment to people with panic/anxiety and phobias. Modelled on proven cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) programs, *FearFighter™* is available to patients, for whom it has been prescribed, at any time over the internet, helping them to identify specific problems, develop and work on realistic treatment goals and monitor achievement of those goals by repeated self-exposure. A total of one hour of scheduled helpline support is provided over the ten week program.

Since fear of face-to-face encounters is inherent to their condition, social phobics as a group will, most likely, benefit to the greatest extent from the future availability of professionally guided self-help treatment. Australia's first cCBT program for social phobia is currently being studied at the University of NSW. This one has feedback and support provided by email.

The value of CBT goes far beyond its being an effective treatment. It's adaptability to various forms of delivery is already creating an availability of treatment which can only increase as times goes on.