



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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Asthma doubles the risk for anxiety disorders in children

Children with asthma are twice as likely to have anxiety disorders and/or depression as other children according to research completed at the University of Washington School of Medicine and Seattle Children's Hospital Research Institute. Records of 1,300 11 to 17 year olds, enrolled in the Seattle-based Group Health Cooperative, 781 of whom had been diagnosed with or treated for asthma and, the rest, a random selection of children with no history of asthma, were studied.

Approximately 16 percent of those with asthma also had depressive or anxiety disorders compared to about 9 percent of those without asthma. It is often harder for children, and adolescents especially, with depressive and anxiety disorders to manage their asthma and, consequently, their physical functioning is more likely to be impaired. Young people with asthma and an anxiety disorder or depression are more likely to smoke, making their asthma even more difficult to treat. The researchers also found that girls, as compared to boys, and children in a single-parent households were at a greater risk of depressive and anxiety disorders and that those whose asthma had been diagnosed more recently and those with greater impairment in their physical health due to their asthma were also more vulnerable.

The researchers conclude that there is a need for physicians to understand that these children are at greater risk for anxiety disorders and/or depression. Both patients and their parents should be educated on the risks and effective treatment programs, addressing both asthma and the depressive or anxiety disorder need to be developed.

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

Eat a tryptophan bar for anxiety relief?

The presence of tryptophan in pumpkin seeds has been a subject of study for Dr. Craig Hudson, a psychiatrist with Ontario's Whitby Mental Health Centre, since 1997. Tryptophan is the amino acid which is converted to serotonin in high light and metabolized to melatonin in low light. Serotonin improves mood, helping in the treatment of anxiety disorders and depression while melatonin induces natural sleep.

Until recently, Dr. Hudson's research has been mostly concerned with treating sleep problems and developing functional foods from the seeds, which he hopes may one day become just as accepted in treating mental illness as medication. His newly published study links pumpkin seeds to the effective treatment of social anxiety disorder. Two different food bars were prepared at the Guelph Food Technology Centre in Guelph, Ontario. This took the form of one, a functional food bar combining cold pressed, de-oiled seed meal for a high concentration of tryptophan and dextrose – tryptophan must be combined with a high glycemic carbohydrate to reduce levels of neutral amino acids that compete with tryptophan for absorption as it travels from the blood stream into the central nervous system and two, a placebo bar containing dried fruit and dextrose but without any source of tryptophan.

Adult patients with social phobia, at Stratford General Hospital, Ontario, were told that they were going to be reading in front of a video camera for thirty people to review later. Monitoring heart rates and through observation, Dr. Hudson found the participants eating the functional food bar to be much less anxious one hour later compared to those eating the placebo bar. While still anxious, they were able to control their anxiety and didn't feel the panic that they felt before. He is, in fact, so convinced of the value of pumpkin seeds – one gram of pumpkin seeds has the same amount of tryptophan as a full glass of milk – in treatment of anxiety disorders and sleep problems that he fully intends to market the bar as a functional food item.

Manage stress and prevent anxiety disorder symptoms

Everyone experiences stress to some extent. Aspects of our environment may cause us fear, pain, shame, worry and sadness, to name just some of the emotions that bring stress into our lives. Stress does not discriminate and, in many people, it can impact upon their physiology to the extent of actually causing changes to structure and function in the brain. It can result in migraines, irritable bowel syndrome, rashes and, of course, anxiety disorders. It may activate anxiety disorders in those predisposed to them or cause a relapse for those who are diagnosed and being, or have been effectively, treated.

Because it is known that stress can play a role in anxiety disorders, especially in post traumatic stress disorder, the fact that some people are resilient to stress, while others are not, has long presented a challenge to mental health research.

Dopamine and BDNF

Recent 'mouse' studies indicate that resistance to stress is not due to the absence of some mechanism which creates vulnerability, as has been thought, but to a biological process resulting in specific adaptations in the brain's response to stress. Most mice placed in a cage with bigger mice adapt but some became overwhelmed and withdraw, avoiding interaction with other mice. Secretion of the neurotransmitter dopamine proved to increase in the brain cells of the stressed mice, while potassium flowing into the cells had a dampening effect on the firing rate of dopamine in the adaptive mice. In tandem with the firing of dopamine-producing cells, there was increased activity of the protein BDNF in the stressed mice not present in the adaptive mice. The researchers traced the production of BDNF to a variation in the gene which produces the protein, and in examining the brains of deceased human beings with a history of depression, they found high levels of BDNF in the same areas in the brain governing survival mechanisms as in the stressed mice, proving the link between stress and depression. Blocking BDNF in the mice allowed them to become resilient to the stress of interaction with the bigger mice. A lot more study is required, of course, before contemplating such action with humans.

Cortisol

Cortisol or, rather, lack of it has also proven, in studies of children at risk of developing post traumatic stress disorder, to make a difference between vulnerability and resilience to stress. Cortisol is the hormone which regulates response to stress. It stimulates body systems diverting blood to critical areas – the heart, lungs and muscles – to enable us to better deal with an emergency.

A boost in cortisol, then, is required to handle stress and its absence appears to result in a biological inability to do so. When cortisol secretion is normal but stress is constant, the consistently higher levels of cortisol lead to chronic stress which, in addition to causing anxiety disorders to develop, may result in physical illness, too.

Female brain versus male brain response

While the exact relationship between stress and anxiety disorders is not known, numerous studies indicate that cortisol levels and neurotransmitter levels both play a role. It is also known that men and women cope differently with stress in terms of brain activity. In men, stress is associated with increased cerebral blood flow in the right prefrontal cortex, its reduction in the left orbitofrontal cortex and a neural response associated with higher levels of cortisol. In women, being under stress activates the limbic system, the area primarily involved with emotion, and cortisol changes are not so apparent. These responses to stress in the female brain last longer than those in the male brain.

Numerous clinical studies have been done to demonstrate effective methods of managing stress and ensuring the relaxation response needed to bring down cortisol levels and normalize neurotransmitter firing.

Stress management

Investigation of the effect of music on stress has shown that listening to classical music, after becoming stressed, is more inductive to relaxation than either sitting in silence or listening to heavy metal! Studies prove that stretching and yoga both effectively reduce stress. Integrative body-mind training - harmony created through posture, relaxation and breathing, a meditation technique rooted in traditional Chinese medicine, can help in responding to stress. In a study of participants randomly assigned to either five days of meditation practice with the integrative body-mind training method or to relaxation training, the body-mind group demonstrated significantly better control of stress. They had lower anxiety, depression, anger and fatigue. Exercise, of course, is of prime importance. We don't need studies to prove it! Feeling physically fit and healthy, feels good mindfully and helps in developing the confidence needed to withstand stressful conditions.

There's a new field of research that is showing that people who feel grateful cope better with stress. They also have less illness and sleep better. So, whether you exercise, meditate, listen to music or cultivate smiling and saying 'thank you', if you work at managing that stress, you can maintain control of your anxiety disorder.

From one reader to another...

Stress

As the leader of an anxiety support group, there is one question I am asked at almost every meeting. Everyone wants to know what causes panic disorder. I use the image of two fighters in a boxing ring. At some point during the fight, there will be a *knock out blow* and one boxer will hit the mat, down for the count. The announcer will make a big deal out of this last hit and describe it in gory detail. The previous fifty punches which weakened the fighter will be forgotten. With panic disorder, I think of the first hits as stressful events. A person is struck with losses or illnesses, one after another. Finally, a serious event triggers a panic attack and panic disorder soon follows. It is easy to overlook the earlier accumulation of stress.

The pressures of life continue to be a factor as someone recovers from panic disorder. It is easy to see why a major event such as the death of a family member would affect anyone. It is more difficult to understand why panic seems to come without an obvious explanation. I can go to a familiar place, be quite comfortable ten times in a row, and then have a panic attack on my eleventh visit. It's so frustrating. This stress seems to come mainly from within. The reason may be partly due to what I'm saying to myself.

Fearful thoughts come to me quite easily. For example, if I'm in a small room with lots of people, I might start to feel warm. I could consider whether the temperature of the room had gone up or whether I was overdressed. But, no, I immediately think, "I'm in trouble." Since my body believes what my mind tells it, my heart starts pumping faster. This naturally makes me feel a lot hotter and increasingly anxious. Clearly, my self-talk makes a difference.

Once I began to understand the power of scary thoughts, I decided to try to eliminate all negative thinking. I wasn't wildly successful. I had discovered another stressful way of life. It took me back to childhood when someone said to me, "Don't think of a



pink elephant." All my mental circus could produce was pink elephants! A more realistic plan would be countering negative thoughts with positive ones.

I practiced using less frightening language, accepting that it would take some time to break old habits. One idea which helped was to talk to myself the way I would speak to a friend. If someone else told me that she was feeling trapped in a particular place, I definitely wouldn't say, "You're going to panic." No, I would reassure her, saying that she wasn't really trapped and that she had handled similar stressful situations before without panicking. I just needed to be as supportive and compassionate towards myself.

Another helpful tactic, for me, in countering negative thinking was being totally honest. Fake reassurance would not dispel fear. For example, I wouldn't believe a cheerful, "I'm just fine," when I was feeling really anxious. I had to say something which matched my real condition. I could accept "This is hard, but I can manage."

Negative elements will always be part of my life. Like everyone, I have blessings and struggles. We can't eliminate stress completely or we probably wouldn't be living full lives. What we can do, however, is try to get rid of unnecessary stress. We don't have to beat ourselves up with negative self-talk. Our voices can be those of comfort.

Colette Carner.

Colette may be contacted by writing to her c/o Lifeline, 431 Victoria Street, Shelburne, Ontario L0N 1S4

Ways to stop that panic attack!

- Cover your mouth and nose and breathe into the bag until you start to feel the panic subsiding.
- Deliberately hyperventilate.
- Sing a song you like. Recite a poem. Tell yourself a funny story.
- Understand and change the way you think about things which cause you to panic (cognitive behavioural therapy).
- Gradually expose yourself to the situations which cause you to panic and, by doing so, show yourself that there is really no reason for fear.

Taking it out on somebody else will not make your stress go away!

By: Stanley Popovich

When feeling stressed or anxious, people often take it out on others. There are better ways! Here are some effective techniques for managing stress, anxiety, and fear.

First and foremost, seek help and treatment from a professional. Getting help from a counselor or other professional is very important and can provide you much help and insight in dealing with your problem.

Sometimes, we get stressed when everything happens at once. Take a deep breath and try to find something to do for a few minutes to get your mind off of the problem – take a walk, listen to some music, read the newspaper or do something that will give you a fresh perspective. This mental timeout can help you to refocus. Challenge your negative thinking with positive statements and realistic ideas. When encountering thoughts that make you feel lonely or depressed, challenge those thoughts by asking yourself questions that will maintain objectivity and common sense. For example, you may think that because you are alone now, you will always be alone. This is just not true. Encountering scary situations sometimes upsets us. Always remember to get the facts – gathering the facts can prevent you from relying on

exaggerated and fearful assumptions. By focusing on the facts, we can distinguish what is reality from what is not.

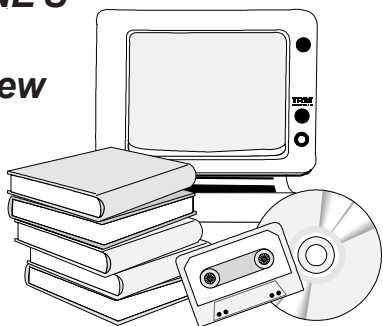
A sure way to overcoming your fears and anxieties, when you get stressed, is finding the source of your fears and being able to manage them. Knowing what is causing your anxieties can go a long way to finding the solution.

With every anxiety-related situation you experience, you begin to learn what works, what doesn't work, and what you need to improve upon in managing your fear. For instance, you have a lot of anxiety and you decide to take a walk to help you feel better. When you next feel anxious you can remind yourself that you got through it the last time by taking a walk. This will give you the confidence to manage your anxiety this time.

Like everything in life, managing stress takes practice. The more you do it, the better you will become. Always remember that there are better ways to deal with it than blaming it on your friends and loved ones.

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/>

LIFELINE'S Media Review



The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety. A Guide to Breaking Free from Anxiety, Phobias, and Worry Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. John P. Forsyth, Georg H. Eifert. New Harbinger Publications. January 2008.

Described as "*mindfulness-based approach to living*" by the authors, acceptance and commitment therapy, or ACT, is a revolutionary new approach, and the research specialty of John Forsyth, a University at Albany, New York, psychology professor and director of the Anxiety Disorders Research Program there, and of Georg H. Eifert, a clinical fellow of the Behavior and Research Society and author of more than a hundred papers on

psychological causes and treatments of anxiety and other emotional disorders, based in California. They have jointly authored a therapist guide and treatment manual on ACT concepts and one for the general public on dealing with problem anger using ACT. This workbook is the first self-help book to adapt the therapy techniques to a program which helps readers to overcome anxiety disorders by incorporating ACT practices into their daily lives. It is written in a style which involves the reader in a fun approach to exploring this new approach to breaking free from anxiety. The package includes a CD-ROM with worksheets, additional exercises and audio programs.

The innovative workbook helps you to find out how your mind can trap you, keeping you stuck and struggling in anxiety and fear, and shows you how to nurture your capacity for acceptance, mindfulness, kindness and compassion, shifting your focus away from anxiety and on to what you really want to do in life. ACT helps people to face their various psychological problems and learn to accept the pain without becoming overwhelmed by it. Then it goes on to help them identify and cultivate their values and commit to living with mindfulness and acceptance providing directions and objectives by the week.