



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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September – scary month for fearful children; worrying time for parents

The first few weeks of the school year can be worrying for parents of shy, fearful children.

When a child is simply afraid of going back to school, he/she is most likely shy and can overcome this shyness by gaining confidence through the example of the way his/her parents deal with social situations. However, if the thought of going back to school causes debilitating fear, the child may be suffering from social phobia and parents will need the assistance of a mental health professional in learning how to help their child. If your child shows unreasonable and irrational fear of being embarrassed or criticised by other children which doesn't appear or, at least, doesn't appear as markedly in the company of adults or even adolescents, you are most likely seeing a symptom of social phobia.

A young child may also either become frozen with fear or throw a tantrum and, if allowed, may withdraw completely from contact with other children. In teens, such response to fear of judgement by others will be a fully fledged panic attack. Fear of others, expressed this way is not the result of a phase a child is going through. It is social anxiety and needs treatment. Please don't let anybody tell you differently.

Hypnosis treats phobias by reprogramming thinking patterns

While contemporary prescribed treatment of phobias include medications to relieve anxiety and panic and cognitive-behavioural therapy to retrain thoughts and responses, many people have success in overcoming phobias through the use of hypnosis. Hypnosis treats phobias by reprogramming thinking patterns, by-passing the conscious mind and its resistance to change, and targeting the subconscious mind where it is readily accepted. The subconscious mind being where fears which cause phobias reside, hypnosis can reach it providing suggestions to ease the anxiety and the message that whatever caused the original fear is no longer valid. Relaxing and soothing to the nerves, hypnosis, in fact has benefits beyond the eliminating phobias and... no negative side-effects.

Family history for mental health is as important as it is for physical health

The chances of having an anxiety disorder increase significantly with the more family members who have anxiety disorders, major depression, drug or alcohol dependence.

These are the findings of a Duke University's Institute for Genome Sciences & Policy study leading to the recommendation that doctors determine a patient's family history of psychiatric problems in order to monitor them. The findings come from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study which evaluated 981 children born in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1972 and 1973. Their mental and physical health was tracked from the age of three through to their thirties.

A simple 30-minute family-history screening test developed at Columbia University Medical Center was used to identify the severity of the four conditions and the researchers were able to calculate family-history scores for three generations of the participants' families – grandparents, parents, and siblings over the age of 10. It was found that the more relatives a participant had with one of these mental health problems, the more likely he or she was to develop a mental health condition, too. The more serious the condition, the greater the risk of it recurring, the more likelihood of impaired ability to function and the more risk of being hospitalized or need for medication.

The researchers feel that the test should be used by doctors in general practice when they ask the customary questions about family history of cancer, heart disease, or diabetes, etc. Unfortunately, questioning people about their family history of mental illnesses is something which so often avoided because of the stigma attached to them. Knowledge and acceptance of the fact that family history can be used to identify those in need of early intervention or more aggressive treatment for mental illnesses will, eventually change this.

The material included in this newsletter is for general information and discussion purposes only and in no way replaces clinically recommended treatment. Subscriptions are free, but a \$5.00 fee is required 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>.

Anxiety sensitive people should attune their activities to what best suits their genes

In the dark days before modern research of the areas of the brain governing memory, fear and the fight-or-flight response, panic and anxiety were perceived as personal weakness. Somehow they were seen as one's own fault.

Today, we know that irrational panic has physiological causes, although the specific causes are less than clear. A predisposition due to inheriting a short version of the 5-HTT gene and consequent hyperactivity in the brain's fear centre when triggered by a stressful situation. Such stress can derive from sudden trauma, an overstimulated thyroid and sensitivity to any number of substances which will cause the body to react physically and create anxiety. This is simply because our genes influence the way food, exercise and environmental forces affect our bodies. While we may still be short on the specifics, we know that people with anxiety sensitivity perceive these physical effects to signal danger. In addition to fearing their own reactions, they are afraid that their anxiety is visible to other people, which increases the fear and, ultimately, causes a panic attack.

Many of these triggers have been thoroughly researched and cognitive therapy and behavioural skills developed to reduce sensitivity and control anxiety. Find out what food or food supplements turn your genes on and off, or how they respond to exercise and environmental forces and you may be on the way to beating your anxiety.

How you eat

Simple things like too much sugar in the diet, excessive salt, not enough green vegetables or an overindulgence in dairy foods have all been shown to cause panic symptoms in people with anxiety sensitivity. In contrast, carbohydrates elevate mood by increasing serotonin the neurotransmitter in the brain which calms and mildly tranquilizes. Complex carbohydrates are obviously preferable in order to avoid hyperthyroidism, weight gain and other physical health problems. B vitamins also support the manufacture of serotonin while foods high in antioxidants and essential fats increase energy levels which relieve anxiety.

Vegetarian Mediterranean and Japanese diets with their higher greens, whole grain and fish content prove to be far less anxiety-producing than the white sugar, salted foods and animal fat in the average North American diet. Caffeine, chocolate and candy should be avoided. Substituting herbal drinks, green tea and raw vegetables will prove beneficial.

How you exercise

Studies have found that lactate or lactic acid precipitates panic in about four-fifths of people with panic disorder but only about one-fifth of the general population. Therefore, it's safe to assume that the increase in lactic acid in the body during strenuous exercise will, in most cases, cause people with anxiety sensitivity to panic. The muscles produce lactate during vigorous exercise when the body is short on meeting

oxygen requirements. Exercise involving stretching or yoga is better – even beneficial – for the anxiety prone. Stretching actually removes lactic acid from the body and there are some thirty calming yoga positions.

What you hear

In the same vein, the body reacts to the tempo of music so that loud, pulsing rock music can trigger anxiety while music therapy with strings, flutes and a soft thirty to sixty beats a minute – for instance, Baroque or slow New Age music – will calm and relax. Slow, abdominal breathing in time to such music improves the parasympathetic nervous system which is the calming branch of the nervous system. Slow breathing to music is also good for lowering high blood pressure. Tai Chi, stretches or yoga done to slow music further increase their calming capabilities.

Booming car stereos are one of the worst anxiety triggers – even in non-anxiety sensitive people. The low-frequency sound waves cause changes in heart-rate patterns and several other physical changes known as extra-aural bioeffects. A contributing factor to the anxiety and panic that results from feeling, rather than hearing, the boom could well be the nasty, anti-social type of driver who comes to mind as the sound waves attack.

The air you breathe

Inhalation of carbon dioxide can trigger panic even in individuals without anxiety sensitivity, suggesting that carbon dioxide may be a major culprit in panic attacks. Just 5% carbon dioxide in the air they are breathing will cause a hypersensitive response due to the changes in carbon dioxide buildup in the blood that results. People with asthma, emphysema and other respiratory conditions suffer more from depression and anxiety than the general population and this is probably caused by the build up of carbon dioxide in their blood during difficulty in breathing and getting enough oxygen.

Quixotically, shortage of carbon dioxide is also associated with panic. Hyperventilation reduces the level of carbon dioxide and calcium in the blood and causes the blood vessels in the brain to constrict causing physical symptoms such as dizziness, numbness and headaches – symptoms which may cause psychological distress, anxiety and panic. People with anxiety sensitivity should never use the paper bag treatment – carbon dioxide in the blood will quickly go from zero to overload and invite a panic attack.

Learn to tailor your diet, exercise program and activities generally to the way your genes work, and ensure that your therapist is one who treats the whole person. Remember that, today, as an anxiety prone person, you can help yourself and, unlike the problems confronting your parents' generation, there is no way that your anxiety should ever be perceived as personal weakness!

From one reader to another...

Being Sensitive

My mother is a sensitive soul. A lot of things bother her. She is well known in local restaurants. If her steak isn't rare, it is sent back to the chef. That's not unusual, but she once complained because the ice cream was too cold. So I was surprised the other night when I was cleaning her kitchen. I saw a small piece of toast which had landed near her waste basket. As I bent down to pick it up and throw it away, it moved. It was covered with small black ants. I started jumping around, "Ants! Ants!" Mother calmly responded, "You weren't expecting live entertainment." I had to laugh because it didn't upset her the way I had expected it to do.

One evening during my anxiety support group meeting, we began to list things in every day life which bothered us. Barb told us the story of being in a store where a television was repeatedly running an advertisement. The problem was the loud volume. Because of her social phobia, Barb is generally not assertive. But she wanted to shop in that part of the store and couldn't tolerate the noise. So, after looking around and seeing no one, she reached over and turned down the volume. We laughed. Maybe it wasn't the right thing to do, but I loved Barb's direct action. For her, it was bold.

In another example, a certain huge chain store was criticized for its overhead lighting. We all hated being in this store. I had wondered for years why I became anxious in some businesses but not in others of the same size. I have since learned that certain types of lighting dilate the pupils. This physical reaction is part of the fight or flight response. So, in a subtle manner, my body was receiving the message that I was in danger. Other people sensitive in this way were getting the same false message.

Most of the members of my group were also troubled when they heard other people having arguments or scolding their children. Being around strong emotion made it hard for us to remain calm. Usually we had to walk away. Some of us also avoided conflict or violence in movies or books. Knowing the situations were fictional didn't always prevent nightmares or alarming thoughts.

It became obvious that our "pet peeves" were actually triggers for our anxiety. Arguing adults or crying children



would bother pretty much everyone. However, we became more than annoyed; we became anxious. We don't seem to be able to filter out or ignore such elements of our environment. We are constantly aware of every detail so we easily become overwhelmed. Understandably, fatigue is a common problem. When other people might be a little tired, we are exhausted. We worry that we won't have enough energy to complete a task or stay until the end of a social gathering.

Our growing list of similarities made us wonder if there was a connection between being sensitive and having panic disorder. Were people who couldn't adapt easily to their surroundings more likely to develop panic disorders?

It's known that phobias tend to run in families. Perhaps my mother and I come from a long line of sensitive women. However my mother has never had a panic attack and, from our talks over the years, she clearly has no idea what I experience because of my panic disorder. As I questioned the other group members, most of them were the only ones in their families who were particularly bothered by loud noises or any of the other factors we discussed.

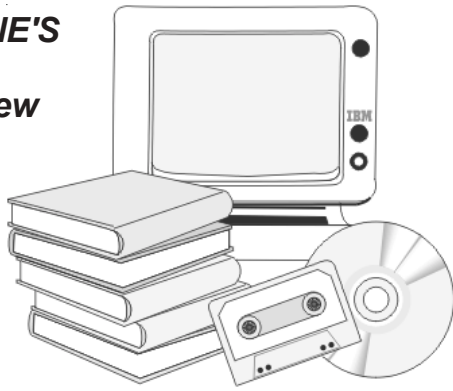
Naturally, we weren't able to resolve these mysteries. It was some consolation knowing we weren't imagining or creating our shared problems. Together we could seek ways to cope with our delicate natures. Most importantly, we could also acknowledge another characteristic we all seemed to share – the ability to sympathize with the suffering of others. Because of our own troubles, people come to us for comfort. We understand because we are sensitive souls.

Colette Carner.

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LIFELINE'S Media Review



Fix Your Phobia in 90 Minutes by Anthony Gunn.
Penguin Books Australia. May 4, 2009.

Australian psychologist and phobias expert Anthony Gunn developed a fear of medical procedures and hospitals at age eighteen when, as exchange student in Central America, he was operated upon without anaesthesia for a collapsed lung.

He became a psychologist because he wanted to cure himself and has gone on to spend his life helping people overcome their phobias. His unique friendly approach to counselling has helped many people in his Penrith, New South Wales practice to successfully manage panic attacks, phobias, social anxiety and shyness and performance anxiety. His book explains the simple, ten-step treatment he developed to treat himself, and which anybody can follow. Written in an easy-to-understand style, the book shows the reader how to successfully treat any phobia in ninety minutes in a series of positive small steps.

Gunn feels that phobias are increasing today because people are exposed to more graphic material in terms of media images of terrorism and war. Since phobias are programmed into a part of the brain – the amygdala – which cannot reason, people know that their phobias are irrational, but cannot control them. He says the prime time for absorbing phobia-fuelling material is in childhood and adolescence because the brain is still growing and can't quite put the logic together and make sense of the world, so it uses the imagination. Phobias are never fully cured but they can be controlled by exposure to the object of the fear and the burning of new neural pathways to a more logical part of a brain. This is, in essence, what the book covers.

In addition to learning how to overcome fear of dogs, spiders, water, flying and life-destroying agoraphobia or social phobia, the reader is also shown how to apply the resulting new self-confidence to other stressful areas of life – job interviews, parenting issues, business difficulties, for example.

Fix Your Phobia in 90 Minutes is a very practical guide to overcoming phobias and getting on with your life. It deserves further investigation.

XBD173 – a benzodiazepine replacement?

Unlike longer term psychotherapy and antidepressant treatment which take several weeks before having any effect, benzodiazepines alleviate fear and anxiety quickly. However, their side effects include fatigue and the development of tolerance, dependence and withdrawal symptoms.

Researchers at the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich have been studying the treatment of anxiety disorders through the stimulation of neurosteroid synthesis to influence the neuronal communication in the brain. They have established that a new substance called XBD173, derived from the hormone progesterone, is as effective as a benzodiazepine without any sedating effects or withdrawal symptoms. The substance proved effective in animal tests, followed by a week long clinical trial of seventy volunteers.

Participants were injected with the neuropeptide fragment CCK-4, which triggers a short anxiety and panic attack lasting two to five minutes. When XBD173 was administered, the subjects did not experience panic attacks and reported no fatigue when taking the drug and no withdrawal symptoms when discontinuing the treatment. A placebo was used in a control group. In contrast, the benzodiazepine Alprazolam, which also effectively prevents anxiety and panic attacks triggered by CCK-4, produces sedation and withdrawal symptoms.

XBD173 calms by increasing the synthesis of neurosteroids in the brain which modulate the GABA neurotransmitter. The research indicates that it will have future use as a safe and fast-acting pharmaceutical anti-anxiety treatment, replacing the benzodiazepines currently required before or along with psychotherapy in acute and severe cases of anxiety disorders.

Is laughter the antidote to anxiety?

Dr Vela Menon of the Faculty of Internal Medicine, International Medical University, Malaysia thinks so. Her theory is that when you laugh you cannot feel fear because your subconscious mind gets the message that there is no danger.

A few minutes of practice regularly for twenty-one days will condition you to easy laughter. Then, whenever you feel anxiety, instead of subconsciously reinforcing it with the wrong message to your subconscious, imagine every part of your body laughing at itself for reacting to a false fight or flight response. Keep doing this and your anxiety will eventually weaken to the point where you will have gained control over how your body reacts and never be in danger of a panic attack again.

This flushing yourself with laughter technique can also be used to dispel inappropriate feelings of despair, guilt, and sadness. Laugh. Be happy.