

## **Defining the Problem:**

For the millions of individuals living with anxiety, the definition of the disorder is as unique as it is universal. Using the definition found in the American Psychological Association, anxiety is ‘an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes. Using a less formal definition, anxiety has been likened to that of ‘running a marathon from your seat’ or ‘being trapped in a fishbowl with all your thoughts and emotions at once’. Combining those two descriptions, it is clear to see how anxiety and panic related disorders can impair the normal functioning of an otherwise healthy individual. As of 2017, there were an estimated 284 million people worldwide who had an anxiety related episode or were diagnosed with the disorder. Anxiety is the most prevalent mental health disorder in the world (DoSomething 2019).

In this brief literature review, the symptoms of anxiety will be explored in addition to proven and alternative methods of treatment.

## **Signs and Symptoms**

Using the criteria found in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, anxiety falls under a broad term of panic related disorders. Fear is the body’s emotional response to real, immediate threats, whereas anxiety is brought on by real and imagined threats which have yet to take place. Symptoms of anxiety disorders are as follow:

- An increased heart rate
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Hyperventilation
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic, or doom
- Difficulty sleeping
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry

These criteria, when combined with other criteria for specific panic related disorders such as social phobias or agoraphobia, can be used to identify what types of panic disorders you may have.

## **Treatment Options**

Treatment for someone struggling with anxiety can come in many forms. In the past, anxiety was treated through talk therapy alone, but there are many intervention options found outside of the four walls of a therapist’s office.

- Yoga: A self-soothing technique which can be used to reduce the impact of an exaggerated stress response. By participating in yoga, people with anxiety are triggering the relaxation response in their bodies. This relaxation response includes the lowering of one’s heart rate and blood pressure, easing of respiration, and improving one’s ability to respond to stress.

- Diet/Food Intake: By reducing one's caffeine intake, the body has a better chance to respond to anxiety in a helpful way. When consuming too much caffeine, the body can mimic the effects of anxiety or an anxiety attack. The same heightened effects can be felt when consuming alcohol and/or nicotine (Cirino 2016).
- Sleep patterns: Getting less than the recommended 8 hours of sleep can interfere with a person's ability to fend off negative thoughts. Without adequate sleep, the body and brain can experience negative stress (Cirino 2016). Ways to combat it are:
  - Setting a sleep schedule
  - Maximizing time spent outside in natural sunlight
  - Getting regular exercise
  - Avoiding bright screens two hours before bed, sleeping in a dark room
- Breathing/Meditation: Controlling your breathing can positively impact the way you come down from an anxious situation. Yoga is a combination of exercise, breathing techniques, and self-guided meditation that results in a person's increased awareness of self. This awareness of self allows an increased reaction time to stress (Cirino 2016).
- Scheduling an appointment with a therapist or counselor to discuss treatment options for anxiety.
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has proven to work in individuals with panic disorders. It requires the individual to focus on their thoughts as they directly impact feelings and behavioral responses (Smith 2019).
  - Eye Movement and Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) works to remove associations between a certain circumstance and symptoms (Riddle 2018).
  - Some patients choose hypnosis in addition to CBT. Hypnosis puts an individual in a state of deep relaxation and asks the person to look at their fears in a new light (Smith 2019).

## References

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