

# What Is Anxiety, and How Can I Tame It?

**Stress vs Anxiety** – Stress develops when forces from the world affect us in negative ways. Like life changes, negative and positive events and daily challenges. Many of us can deal with those things without experiencing long-term negative effects. People with Anxiety Disorders, like General Anxiety Disorder (GAD), experience constant physical and emotional affects on a regular daily basis. They worry about every day problems like: their job; money; family; health; household chores; their car; appointments; daily details, etc. They live in perpetual fear. GAD affects about 6.8 million Americans. It also affects twice as many women as men. Some possible physical symptoms of Anxiety are: headaches; heart palpitations; colon spasms, diarrhea/constipation; dry mouth; shallow breathing; frequent urination; sexual problems; aches and pains; trembling of the body (inside or outside); feeling “on edge”, impatient or irritable; poor concentration; forgetfulness; sleep problems; hyper vigilance, etc. People with anxiety want to be “in charge” of their environments to reduce the fear they experience. Anxiety feels like a constant turbulent river running inside.

When I work with people with anxiety, I help them to understand anxiety is not their fault, and that it is caused by 4 factors:

- heredity
- brain chemistry
- personality
- life experiences

## **Heredity and anxiety disorders:**

Research shows that anxiety disorders run in families. If you think about your relatives, some may have behaviors that are annoying and unexplained, until you become aware that the causes of their overreactions may be due to the fact that they live in fear. Many people who are: perfectionist types; abuse drugs/alcohol; seem controlling or angry; worry excessively; are shy or aggressive; restrict life; fear rejection; don't feel safe; etc. may suffer from anxiety.

## **Brain chemistry and anxiety disorders:**

Because symptoms of anxiety disorders are often relieved by medications that alter levels of chemicals in the brain, scientists believe that brain chemistry appears to play a role in the onset of anxiety disorders. I believe that some types of anxiety can be managed by using life-style change and symptom coping skills. It is my opinion that medication should be given as a last resort, because all medications have side-effects.

## **Personality and anxiety disorders:**

Researchers believe that personality may play a role in the development of an anxiety disorder, noting that people who have low self-esteem and poor coping skills may be more prone. If a person has an “easy going” temperament instead of an intense one, they will be able to deal with life in a calmer, more manageable way.

## **Life experiences and anxiety disorders:**

Researchers believe that the relationship between anxiety disorders and long-term exposure to abuse (physical, emotional, sexual); violence; rape; or poverty as a child or adult may affect an person's susceptibility to anxiety. Contributing factors could also be, if you had a childhood where your parent abused alcohol; were neglectful of you; abandoned you; or your parents had a relationship filled with conflict; etc.

## **Sub-personalities of people with anxiety**

**The Worrier** (what if, what if) anticipates the worst scenario; overestimates the chances of something bad or embarrassing happening; creates grandiose images of failure or catastrophe.

**The Critic:** (promotes low self esteem) constantly judges and evaluates your behavior; points out flaws and limitations about you; jumps on any mistake you make; compares you with others performances and sees them excelling; ignores the positive qualities you have.

**The Victim** (promotes depression) sometimes feels helpless or hopeless; tells you that you're not progressing; believes there is something defective about you; perceives insurmountable obstacles to your success; believes nothing will ever change.

**The Perfectionist:** (promotes chronic stress & burnout) nags you to "do better" because your effort is not enough; hounds you to work harder, faster, longer, to be more productive; wants you to be the best; intolerant of mistakes/setbacks; pushes you into exhaustion and burnout over time.

Anxiety seldom disappears completely. Learning how to manage it can help you to feel empowered and "in charge" again.

#### **How To Tame The Anxiety:**

- Take multiple B vitamins
- Do yoga and/or bodywork
- Recite positive self-statements throughout the day
- Learn meditation and/or self-hypnosis
- Focus on your good qualities and accomplishments
- Exercise regularly by doing something you enjoy
- Eliminate as much "simple sugar" and starches from your diet as you can
- Expect to feel uncomfortable from stressful situations
- Talk with friends or someone you can trust about your worries/problems
- Recognize and accept your limits (remember we are all unique and different)
- When you choose specific tasks and goals, make sure your expectations are reasonable
- Become aware of how/when your body and mind are reacting to stressors, so you can manage them
- Practice Diaphragm Breathing Breaks, 3 times a day, and when you're feeling anxious
- Eliminate or reduce stimulates such as caffeine from your diet (i.e. coffee, tea, chocolate, colas)
- Set your own priorities and ask your boss to set priorities for you at work, if necessary
- When studying for an exam, or working on a large project, work in short blocks of time and take frequent short breaks
- Allow yourself 2 hours to "unwind" before you actually lie down to sleep (guided imagery and/or nature sound CDs, with headphones help promote sleep)

**Still A Problem?** If you've previously tried the above suggestions and are still having problems, you may benefit from going to a Licensed Holistic Therapist for alternative help. I use a combination of breathing methods, energy medicine techniques, self-hypnosis, guided imagery CDs and the most up-to-date Power Therapies. Sometimes people with anxiety have experienced trauma and need additional/alternative treatment. Talk therapy mostly addresses only the right side of the brain, so healing can be a lengthy process, and sometimes doesn't integrate the trauma.

Whereas, therapies such as Hypnosis, interacts with the subconscious mind, and EMDR address both hemispheres of the brain, so healing trauma is usually much quicker.

Sometimes it's difficult to find the time for daily self-care to ease anxiety. However, you are responsible for your well-being and you deserve to be healthy. Because you have anxiety, you may have to devote more time and effort into Taming your anxiety than you thought, similar to a person with diabetes who has to take time daily to plan meals, take blood sugar readings, etc. to maintain their health. Anxiety maintenance is similar. Set your intention to make time for yourself each day. Try actually writing your breathing breaks, self-hypnosis, exercise times and nightly wind-down time into your daily planner/palm pilot, to make sure you don't schedule over your time. You are just as important as those other appointments. Remember people with anxiety have a way of *burning themselves up and out* because they "drive" themselves into burnout at an early age, unconsciously. You deserve more than that. Be kind to yourself. Find time for the self-care and your anxiety will decrease.

Donna Bird, LCSW, CCH is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker specializing in Mind-Body Counseling and Coaching. She is nationally certified in Hypnosis, E.M.D.R., Interactive Imagery, Hypnobirthing, TFT and Wave Work. She has studied meditation since 1984. In 1990 she began teaching stress reduction and meditation in the government sector. Donna also produces Self-Help CDs that are available in her offices and on her website: [www.donnabird.com](http://www.donnabird.com). She has private practices in Albany and Saratoga Springs, NY. You can contact her through her website, or at (518) 584-0698.