

# Overcoming Anxiety

Presented by

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# What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a mental and physical reaction to perceived threats.
- In small doses, anxiety is helpful. It protects us from danger and focuses our attention on problems.
- When anxiety is too severe, or occurs too frequently, it can become debilitating.

# What is Fight, Flight, or Freeze Response?

- Body's automatic, built-in system designed to protect us from threat or danger.
- When you feel threatened, the fight, flight, freeze response is automatically triggered, and several physiological changes prepare you to cope with the situation.
- Anxiety can also trigger this system into action when we believe there is threat or danger even if there is not.

# Symptoms of Anxiety

- Dizziness
- Increased heart rate
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Racing thoughts
- Fatigue
- Shaking
- Sleeping difficulties
- Decreased concentration
- Tensed muscles

# Types of Anxiety



**Generalized Anxiety:** An excessive amount of anxiety or worry in several areas of life, such as a job responsibilities, health, finances, or minor concerns.



**Phobias:** A very intense fear of a specific situation or object, which is out of proportion to its actual threat. For example, a fear of giving speeches, or of spiders, could be considered a phobia.



**Panic:** An abrupt and intense onset of extreme anxiety. During a panic attack, the individual experiences numerous physical symptoms. This can even be mistaken for a heart attack.



**Social Anxiety:** Social anxiety is the fear of social situations that involve interaction with other people.

# How Does Anxiety Grow?

Avoidance behaviors are activities that people engage in/don't engage in to reduce feelings anxiety.

These behaviors are problematic because in the long run they only serve to increase fear.

Anxiety -> Avoidance->  
Temporary Relief

Examples: Leaving a gathering early, dropping a class, changing jobs, avoiding socialization.

It can generate a host of other unwanted emotions such as sadness, guilt and shame, frustration, and more.



# Coping Skills to Manage Anxiety

# Diaphragmatic Breathing



A simple but effective method of relaxation. It is a core component of yoga and Zen meditation. It takes place when, instead of just breathing with your ribs, you breathe so that your lower belly expands.



Diaphragmatic breathing allows one to take normal breaths while maximizing the amount of oxygen that goes into the bloodstream.



It is a way of interrupting the 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response and triggering the body's normal relaxation response.

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Progressive muscular relaxation, or PMR, is useful for relaxing your body when your muscles are tense.
- The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles, so that they're tightly contracted. Hold them in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds, and then relax the muscles normally. Then, consciously relax your muscles even more. This process of moving from intense tension to deep muscular relaxation helps interrupt your body's fight, flight, freeze response when you're experiencing fear or stress.
- What you'll find is that when you tense your muscles first, it's easier, then, to relax these muscles completely. When you try to relax your muscles without tensing them, you'll find that they don't relax as thoroughly.

# Visualization

- Imagery
  - Paint a picture of a calming place in your mind.
  - Go through each of your senses and imagine what you would experience in your relaxing place.
  - Sight, sound, touch, taste, smell.

# Coping Statements

- When you detect self-defeating or anxiety provoking thoughts, try to substitute them with helpful coping thoughts.
  - Keep breathing. This won't last long.
  - Relax my muscles. Let the tension go.
  - Just stay until the fear decrease. It will decrease if I wait.
  - I am stronger than my fear
  - Just because I'm scared doesn't mean I can't do it
  - It's ok to be scared
  - Anxiety is temporary and harmless

# Understanding Triggers

- A trigger is an anxiety provoking stimulus.
- Learning to identify triggers and the negative events they're associated with is a helpful in understanding the language of the amygdala and its role in producing your anxiety.
- What can I do to cope with my triggers?

# Exposure

- Confront, rather than avoid anxiety-provoking situations.
- Creating a step-by-step list.
- Expose yourself to them in small but increasing steps.
- By practicing exposure, you can communicate new information to your brain and rewire pathways associated with specific triggers.

# Other Coping Skills



Exercising



Meditation



Sleep



Change your interpretations to reduce anxiety



Act despite your anxiety