

*Maryland State Bar Association
Lawyer Assistance Program*

Wellness Tip Sheet

Anxiety

Everyone experiences anxiety from time to time, and it can be a healthy way to cope with daily stressors. It is very normal to feel nervous about an interview, tense when having an argument, or apprehensive when making difficult decisions. Anxiety can help you navigate through stressful situations in your life and be more prepared for handling complicated decisions. Anxiety becomes a problem when normal emotions, such as worry, take over and disrupt and consume your life. You need to seek assistance if your anxiety is affecting your daily functioning.

An anxiety disorder can be caused by a medical condition, mental health condition, the effects of drugs and alcohol, or from a combination of conditions. It is very important when diagnosing anxiety to rule out any medical problems that might be causing it.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

Panic Disorders: Intense periods of fear, terror, or doom that come on very quickly. These episodes are called panic attacks and may include the following symptoms:

- Sweating
- Chills
- Shortness of breath
- Heart Palpitations
- Feeling like you are choking
- Chest pain
- Stomach upset or nausea
- Dizziness
- A feeling of being detached from the world
- Feeling detached from yourself
- Difficulty thinking - feeling as if your mind has gone blank
- Fear of dying
- Numbness or tingling

Phobias: Intense, persistent, irrational and recurring fear. A *Specific Phobia* is a fear of a thing or situation, for example, a fear of bugs or closed in places. A *Social Phobia* is a fear of being embarrassed in a social situation. *Agoraphobia* is when one avoids public places, especially very large open spaces such as malls or airports where there are few places to hide.

Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD): An OCD Disorder is where an individual has continuous, intrusive and distressing thoughts (obsessions), such as a fear of snakes or germs. Compulsions are repetitive rituals to get rid of the obsessive thoughts, for example, excessive hand washing.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: When a child experiences extreme anxiety when separated, or anticipating being separated, from the child's parents or other care giver.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: When an individual has excessive, unrealistic, uncontrollable worry over a period of at least six months. Symptoms may include:

- Headaches, sweating or chills, nausea, dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Restlessness
- Muscle tension
- Easily tired
- Irritability
- Sleep Problems
- Trouble concentrating
- Diarrhea
- Irritable bowel syndrome

Many people visit their doctors with the above complaints without realizing these are common symptoms of generalized anxiety.

Prevention:

You don't need to fall into one of the above disorders to be overwhelmed by anxiety. Due to our very stressful society, anxiety can get to a level where it is uncomfortable and difficult to manage. Some helpful hints to prevent or manage anxiety:

- Taking care of yourself by exercising, eating healthy, and getting enough sleep
- Developing interpersonal skills to cope with difficult people and situations, or parenting skills training to develop a better relationship with your children.
- Avoiding the use of caffeine, alcohol, illicit drugs, or the inappropriate use of prescription medications
- Meditation
- Relaxation exercises, including deep breathing
- Visualization
- Call your Lawyer Assistance Program

If you have any of these symptoms and would like to learn more about how to cope with anxiety please contact your Lawyer Assistance Program for free, confidential, assistance at 410-685-7878 x3041 or 800-492-1964 x3041.

