

Help and Hope for Those with Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a part of daily living. "Normal" anxiety helps us survive and be productive; too much can be debilitating. Anxiety disorders include panic disorder (PD) with panic attacks; phobias; generalized anxiety disorder (GAD); social anxiety disorder (SAD); obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD); and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Anxiety disorders are real illnesses: people who suffer with anxiety disorders experience overwhelming anxiety and fear that is chronic and unremitting, and can grow progressively worse. As a group, anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in America, and according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) affect about 40 million American adults (18 years and older) in a given year, "...causing them to be filled with fearfulness and uncertainty" (NIMH, 2006). Anxiety disorders also occur in children.

What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is a period of intense anxiety characterized by three or more of the following symptoms that occur for no rational reason. The anxiety or fear is not in response to a situation that tends to cause anxiety or fear in most people or due to an organic cause:

1. Shortness of breath or smothering sensations
2. Choking
3. Palpitations or accelerated heart rate
4. Chest pain or discomfort
5. Sweating
6. Dizziness, unsteady feelings, or faintness
7. Nausea or abdominal stress
8. Feelings of unreality
9. Numbness or tingling sensations
10. Flashes (hot flashes) or chilling
11. Trembling or shaking
12. Fear of becoming seriously ill or dying
13. Fear of going crazy or losing control

Agoraphobia is the fear of panic attacks, when a person begins to avoid the situations where the attacks have occurred. Some commonly avoided activities are driving, shopping, eating in restaurants, and riding in elevators/escalators. Some agoraphobics isolate themselves in their homes and avoid all contact. Depression may become an additional problem.

To connect with a supportive presence, or to find information on where you can find help, please contact the MHAV/ABIL Warm Line at 804-257-5591, toll free at 1-866-400-6428, or email abil1996@yahoo.com

Suggested Reading List

- "Don't Panic: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks"* by R. Reid Wilson, Ph.D.
- "Anxiety Disorders and Phobias: A Cognitive Perspective"* by Aaron T. Beck and Gary Emery with Ruth L. Greenberg
- "Overcoming Panic Disorder: A Woman's Guide"* by Lorna Weinstock, M.S.W. and Eleanor Gilman
- "Anxiety, Phobias, and Panic: A Step-by-Step Program for Regaining Control of Your Life"* by Reneau Z. Peurifoy, M.A., M.F.T.
- "Panic Attacks Workbook: A Guided Program for Beating the Panic Trick"* by David Carbonell, Ph.D. (Director of the Anxiety Treatment Center)
- "Anxiety and Depression Workbook for Dummies"* by Charles H. Elliot, Ph.D. and Laura L. Smith, Ph.D.
- "Overcoming Anxiety for Dummies"* by Charles H. Elliot, Ph.D. and Laura L. Smith, Ph.D.
- "Depression for Dummies"* by Charles H. Elliott, Ph.D. and Laura L. Smith, Ph.D.
- "Master Your Panic and Take Back Your Life 3rd Edition: Twelve Treatment Sessions to Conquer Panic, Anxiety and Agoraphobia"* by Denise F. Beckfield, Ph.D.
- "Triumph Over Fear: A Book of Help and Hope for People with Anxiety, Panic Attacks, and Phobias"* by Jerilyn Ross (President of the Anxiety Disorders Association of America)
- "When Once Is Not Enough: Help for Obsessive Compulsives"* by Gail Steketee, Ph.D. and Kerrin White, M.D.
- "Talking to Anxiety: Simple Ways to Support Someone in Your Life Who Suffers from Anxiety"* by Claudia J. Strauss
- "Talking to Depression: Simple Ways to Connect When Someone in Your Life is Depressed"* by Claudia J. Strauss