

## ANXIETY

We all experience anxiety when we are stressed and overwhelmed by life events. Anxiety can range from mild to severe panic. Generally, anxiety has signs in three main domains:

**Emotional:** Fear and tension

**Physical:** Dry mouth, unsettled stomach, accelerated heart beat, sweating, trembling, constant need to go to the bathroom, difficulty with breathing

**Mental:** Scary thoughts ("I can't do / I will look stupid / I'm losing my control, etc.")

There are life events, changes and crises that generate anxiety in all of us, such as leaving home, exams, graduation, relationships, money, loneliness, losses...

Often our past experiences, beliefs and attitudes determine our reactions to these situations. Thus, some situations may be especially anxiety provoking for us.

Sometimes we know that there is no apparent explanation for why we are feeling this way. Being anxious is definitely not being "weak" or "abnormal" However, if anxiety affects other parts of your life, you have to do something about it.

Anxiety is an intense and disturbing feeling. It is a normal wish to avoid it. However, it is not the best way to deal with anxiety.

### Is my anxiety a problem?

If anxiety is a normal and basic emotion like sadness, how can you understand if it has become a problem? Check the following:

- Do I feel anxious more often than not throughout my day?
- Am I avoiding things that I have to or want to do in order to deal with anxiety?
- Do I experience anxiety in certain predictable situations?
- Am I intensely fearful of specific situations or things (animals, closed spaces, etc.)?
- Do I experience anxiety in social situations?
- Have I developed elaborate rituals or thoughts to prevent things that I'm anxious of from happening?
- Is my anxiety related to a specific traumatic event?

### What type of anxiety do I experience?

The situations in which intense anxiety is the central symptom are listed below:

**Panic Disorder:** Panic attack is a situation in which intense fear or discomfort is accompanied by physical complaints such as sweating, trembling and heart palpitations as well as mental symptoms such as fear of going mad and/or dying. In panic disorder, there are intense worries about the recurrence of the panic attack.

**Phobias:** It is the experience of extreme and irrational fear when there is an actual or expected encounter with a living thing, object or situation. (e.g. spider, altitude). Social phobia is the fear of social situations (e.g. public speaking). In these situations, physical symptoms such as blush may be experienced and thus, there may be a strong desire to avoid these situations.

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder:** It is the situation in which persistent disturbing thoughts, impulses or images and recurring rituals (e.g. washing hands, checking) become very time-consuming, impair daily life and are perceived as extreme and nonsense by the person.

**Post-traumatic Stress Disorder:** It is the intense fear, helplessness and horror associated with a traumatic event that the person experienced or witnessed.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** It is a situation in which worry and anxiety are experienced more than not in a period of at least 6 months. Fatigue, irritability, muscle tension and sleep disturbances may be present.

### What can I do?

Determine the situations which cause and accompany anxiety:

- What causes anxiety in you?
- What are the thoughts and physical complaints that accompany anxiety?
- How distressing is the anxiety?
- How do you deal with anxiety? You may try the following to reduce your anxiety:
- Face it, instead of avoiding. Usually it appears that nothing is as bad as we expected and we feel glad that we decided to face it.
- Encourage yourself and learn relaxation techniques. When you feel anxious, taking in your breath slowly from your nose

and giving it slowly through your mouth for a couple of times may help.

- Focus on the positives of your life – challenge your negative thoughts. Take a step back and look at your experiences from a calmer and more realist perspective.
- Don't criticize yourself too harsh. Emphasize your success and strengths as well as your failures and weaknesses.
- Don't assume responsibility of events that are outside your control.
- Establish realistic and attainable goals.
- Don't make everything a catastrophe; try to avoid thinking in all-or-nothing terms. Remind yourself that failing to do something is not the end of the world.
- Try not to worry excessively about future: trying to predict future, while you have no way of knowing, may make you anxious. Concentrate on here-and-now.
- Try not to compare yourself with others.
- Engage in daily physical exercise.
- Care about your nutrition and sleep. Try to reduce or eliminate the use of alcohol and drugs. Reduce you caffeine intake.
- Seek support from your family and friends. **Managing anxiety is something you can learn and requires practice. As you try the methods that make you feel better, you will see that you can succeed.**

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#### **For More Information**

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(The services are available only to the students and staff of Ýstanbul Bilgi University.)

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