



ANXIOUS ABOUT BEING ANXIOUS

by John Park, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist

Have you experienced anxiety? Has stress ever gotten the best of you? I am not familiar with anyone who has not experienced stress or anxiety. In this brief overview, I want to briefly share with you what anxiety is, how it is a major problem in society, and how we can deal with it effectively. Often times, anxiety is not the problem; rather, it is how we view and deal with anxiety that leads to problems.

According to the World Economic Forum (2016), the cumulative economic loss, both direct and indirect costs, due to anxiety and mental health problems will exceed 16 trillion dollars. Anxiety has one of the highest comorbidity rates, as high as 77%, with other mental health disorders and medical conditions (US National Comorbidity Study, 2017). In current society, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, over 31% of Americans experience anxiety on a consistent, daily basis. It is also documented that anxiety and anxiety related disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, phobias, etc., are one of the most under-reported and under-treated disorders out of all mental health conditions. I share these statistics and general trends

to share how anxiety is a major problem, if not an epidemic that impacts all of us, whether directly or indirectly. It costs society and our lives in detrimental ways.

Often time, we think of anxiety as a negative or bad thing that we should not experience. And whenever we do have it, we try to do whatever we can to get rid of it which is why we may engage in behaviors such as drinking, taking anxiety medications, or other consequential forms of coping. So, what exactly is anxiety? And how can I deal with it in a healthy way?

Anxiety, in simple scientific and biological terms, is the emotional and physiological experience that we have such as arousal, tension, and other symptoms. It is also known as the “fight or flight” response that our body goes through when we feel threatened in some way. The anxiety response is actually a normal and healthy response we have to various stressors in life. When our minds and bodies get activated, it is being charged with adrenaline, which provides us with energy to “fight” or “flight.” Understanding the nature and course of anxiety is the first step in learning how to cope effectively with anxiety. In my next section, I want to share with you how anxiety can become an unhealthy cycle which can lead to health consequences. By taking steps to break the cycle, we can gain control over our lives.

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