

Coping With Anxiety by Dr. Stan Hyman

What's the difference between Normal and Unhealthy Anxiety?

The typically anxious feelings most of us are accustomed to getting can often be considered to be nervousness about something about something we will be doing in the future. This is known as anticipatory anxiety and is quite common.

For example: making a presentation to a client or giving a talk to a group; taking a test; going out on a date with someone new; asking for a raise at work or any number of other clearly identifiable stressors that could cause anxiety.

We may worry about things as they are about to come up or even think about them later in reviewing how we think they went.

The worry we experience in normal anxiety is typically in proportion to the way we feel about the task or event. It doesn't necessarily preoccupy us or cause us to become consumed or obsessed for inordinately long periods of time.

The mechanism that causes this uptick in feeling is the fight or flight mechanism that all creatures in the animal kingdom have built into their brains. If we fear something this mechanism gets triggered and we feel a surge of adrenaline to help us react.

In normal anxiety this process lasts for an appropriate amount of time and we go back to functioning without that fear.

In unhealthy anxiety we continue to worry about stuff and are continually somewhat elevated with adrenaline unnecessarily. This fearful feeling state causes a type of chronic stress that can have the effect of wearing us down, sometimes to near exhaustion.

Coping Tips for reducing Anxiety:

Vigorous exercise: If you don't already have an exercise regimen and you are suffering from anxiety (the unhealthy type) you should create one right away. It is an undisputed fact that exercising regularly can reduce anxiety.

Deep breathing: Practicing breathing deeply can help to adjust your anxious state and have a calming effect on both your mind and your body. A technique that seems to work well is the 4-7-8 method. Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, hold your breath to a count of 7 and then breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of 8.

Get centered: Recognize that anxiety is a feeling state, it is emotionally driven. It is not who you are, it is what you are dealing with. Recognizing that anxiety is

merely a symptom can help you get enough distance from it to deploy coping strategies.

Question your thoughts: You have probably had negative thoughts which automatically come to your mind. These thoughts are not necessarily true and factually based but are often “knee-jerk” type responses.

If you let these thoughts control you (for example, obsessively worrying about what someone may be thinking) you will fall victim to an anxiety loop which will cause you even more worry. You must challenge your thoughts with other, more factually based counter thoughts. (for example, he could be thinking anything, nobody can read anyone else’s mind).

Distance yourself from your thinking: When you realize that there are literally billions of thought fragments running through a person’s mind at any time, you can appreciate that we only focus on that which we bring into consciousness. That is, you can choose to see your thought as a simple string of words that only have meaning when you decide to give it meaning.

Practice giving your thoughts different meaning: Referring to the distancing strategy, take any thought and write it down. Now arrange the thought using different tones or emphasis to create other meanings. Recognize that you have control over the meaning you impute to any thought.

Stay centered in the NOW: A big mistake anxious people make is to think about things that have not yet happened and behave as if they are happening now. The brain will respond to dangers or threats even if they are imagined! Humans do this but other animals do not. Stay present and bring yourself back to the present whenever you find yourself worrying about a future event. The deep breathing exercise can help you do this.

About Dr. Stan Hyman

Dr. Stan Hyman has been successfully treating individuals with anxiety for more than 25 years. He is a professional member of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) (www.ADAA.org) an organization dedicated improving the treatment of both anxiety and depression through research and development of effective strategies for treatment.

Dr. Hyman’s office is located at: 2999 NE 191 Street, suite 703, Aventura, Miami, Florida, 33180.

Dr. Hyman can be reached for a consultation by phone at 305-933-9779 or by email at drstan@drstanhyman.com. Sessions can also be conducted via Skype where he can be reached at drstanhyman.