



Getting to Know: Stress, Anxiety, Depression and Panic Attacks

Many people think that freedom from physical illness is enough to consider them healthy but in reality, health is not achieved by being physically fit alone.

Even the World Health Organization (WHO) will agree that being healthy is not only measured by just having a fit body. In fact, health is defined as not merely an absence of disease but should be a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being. Take note of the word "complete". Therefore, a person who does not have physical illness but is socially withdrawn is not healthy. It just clearly shows your cognitive/emotional well-being is equally important.

Nowadays, mental problems have been a growing concern. With so many stresses in life (economy gone bad, jobs loss and inflation), many people have lost their state of well-being. The situations mentioned above have found its way to shake a person's mental health. With problems like anxiety, panic attacks and depression, people have been hit with a gunshot point-blank.

Stress

Stress has the capacity to alter one's perception. In the event that problems become too overwhelming to handle especially those related to money, job or relationship, people will really have a hard time juggling them. Although this can be manageable if handled properly, there are just some people who fail to cope with it. Ineffective coping can progress into mental disorders. Three of the common disorders that are becoming increasingly prevalent are anxiety, depression and panic attacks.

Anxiety

Anxiety is considered as the number one mental illness in United States alone. According to Anxiety Disorders Association of America, 40 million people are affected with this problem, which is tantamount to 18% of the population in a year. Its incidence rate is higher among older women.

Anxiety is usually described as the fear of unknown. In some cases, this is deemed normal. A little of its presence is needed to help a person to cope up with a difficult situation, only then when it is excessive that it becomes a disorder.

When a person is anxious, the body has its own physical reaction. Here are some of the responses:

- Increased heart rate and palpitations
- Gastrointestinal disturbance such as stomach upset
- Tensed muscles
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty of concentrating

Anxiety can be managed with or without the use of medications. The best way to prevent it from progressing is by adapting various stress management techniques. Deep breathing exercise allows people to calm down. Getting out of a noisy and crowded environment would lessen factors that could worsen the condition. Finding support is also one of the best solutions. In some cases, those who want quick relief and are already immune to natural therapies will be given medications such as anti-anxiety drugs including Diazepam, Lorazepam and anything alike.

Panic Attacks

When anxiety becomes too intensive in a given situation, this could lead to the occurrence of panic attacks. It lurks discretely into a person and can happen to anyone. People experiencing panic attacks have a feeling of great fear of dying and discomfort. You probably have seen this in movies, especially when a person keeps on shouting because of great terror (despite the fact that the situation is still under control).

Now, what happens to the body in the event of panic attack? All symptoms present in general anxiety are also manifested and sometimes even more. Remember, there is sudden surge of terror and in return, your whole body is being prepared to drive away from what you actually fear. During an attack, one's fight or flight response is highly activated thus bodily responses is greatly increased. This makes you highly sensitive to anything, even though there is no longer an actual threat.

Though it is not curable, panic attacks can be stopped. It is just a matter of how you perceive the situation. In most cases, victims of panic attacks are usually disconnected from reality. Therefore, the support of friends and family is very much needed. They must also be desensitized to let them realize that there is no actual threat.

If you have experienced panic attacks, you are most likely able to recognize its onset. The next time it happens to you, do something before it progresses. When your heart starts to palpitate or your breathing suddenly increases, get a paper bag and start breathing into it. You can also try calming down by allowing yourself to think of happy thoughts. Seek comfort and ask somebody to hold you, so that you would not feel alone. Prevent it further by avoiding caffeinated beverages or activities like smoking and drinking alcohol.

A person should learn how to overcome panic attacks because it can lead to a disorder. This can be harder to manage since most people who have the disorder are often in denial. They do this to avoid being ridiculed thus making it more difficult to get them help.

Depression

Depression is dysthmic disorder wherein the person has an extreme feeling of sadness. There is also a feeling of hopelessness and suicidal tendencies. In the United States, over 18 million adults (from ages 18 and above) have been affected with this disorder. Kids (especially the pre-schoolers) are also affected and there has been an overwhelming 23% increase in its incidence rate every year

This disorder can be attributed to many things. It may be purely familial, which means that you are already susceptible from the moment you were born. It may also be due to unfortunate events like loosing a job, death of a loved one or failing an endeavor. Society can also bring depression upon to you especially when you are the laughing stock of your friends or when you experience constant rejection from the crowd.

Here are some of the common things you will see in a person with depression:

- Does not like to do anything
- Rarely interacts with other people; prefers to be alone
- Easily angered or irritated
- Does not like to eat; usually results to weight loss
- Has troubles falling asleep and usually oversleeps
- Having suicidal thoughts

People with depression need to have a strong support group. The most important thing they need to have is the love of family and friends. Sometimes they require assistance in performing daily activities. Depressed people also have to seek physician's help to undergo most suitable type of therapy. Some of them are:

- Bright Light Therapy: use of morning sunlight for people who have seasonal depressions.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy: used to correct misconceptions and alter abnormal behaviors that contribute to illness.
- Interpersonal Therapy: used to help identify conflicts that can be worked out to make relationships less straining.

In worst conditions, Electroconvulsive therapy may be suggested as a quick relief from symptoms of depression. This works by inducing electric currents to the brain. It may sound crazy but it has been one of the most effective treatments for some mental disorder. In addition, medications like Tetracyclics, Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors and Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors are also usually prescribed.

Conclusion

Anxiety, panic attacks and depression are just few of the illnesses that can affect the overall health of a person. These problems should not be taken lightly because they could progress into an uncontrollable state.

Moreover, for all the healthy people out there, always be on guard. Remember, stress can come in all forms. They also mutate and creep into your life when you least expect it. In the end, it can cause you to falter.

All of these things also prove the importance of appropriate stress management. Every person should know them as they can be used as a shield from various mental (and physical) illnesses.