



COMMON & TREATABLE

by Michelle Kelley, LCSW

Do you suffer from chronic, acute or even mild anxiety? If so, then you might find some comfort in knowing that you have plenty of company. In fact, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America tells us that 40 million Americans age 18 and over suffer from some kind of anxiety issue. That's about one-fifth of the entire adult population! Unfortunately, only about one-third of sufferers seek help -- even though it is a highly treatable condition.

In light of those stats, anxiety is the most common issue that brings a person into counseling. Although seeking help can be embarrassing, it is the first step towards getting better and taking back control of your life. Given the vast number of people who suffer from anxiety in our society, you are clearly not alone and there is no shame in seeking professional help.

One of the ways we make ourselves anxious is with negative self-talk - a habit of telling ourselves the worst will happen. As a counselor I always ask my clients to think about what they are thinking about -- a strange concept at first. Our emotions, in part, come from our thoughts. It behooves all of us to be very mindful of what is going on inside of our heads. If you haven't tried it, I suggest that you keep a journal or somehow track your thoughts. Are they negative, positive or a mixed bag? Negative, destructive or fearful thoughts can affect you emotionally and physically. Fortunately, it is possible to change your thoughts through persistence and dedication which can be powerful and life changing. And it all starts with being mindful.

Now that we have established that anxiety is common and treatable, let's address some frequently asked questions.

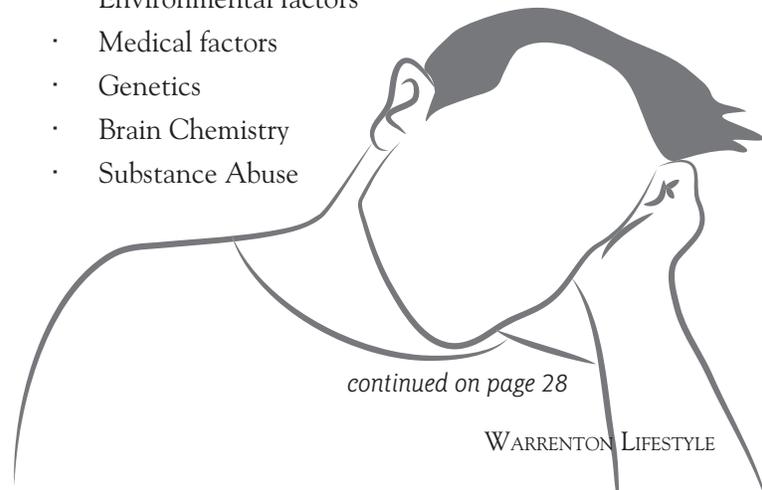
Who can get anxiety?

Anyone at all -- even children. With anxiety at epidemic levels among children, it is important that they learn how to push through their fears and worries to build resiliency and independence. Anxiety does not discriminate, but some people are more susceptible and prone to feeling anxious than others. There is also a possible genetic component that comes into play.

What causes anxiety?

Possible causes of anxiety can include but are certainly not limited to:

- Fearful, intrusive thoughts, negative self-talk
- Environmental factors
- Medical factors
- Genetics
- Brain Chemistry
- Substance Abuse



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WHO'S IN CONTROL?



You are! That's the good news.

Anxiety is not a sign of instability and it does not mean you are crazy. It means you are human and are most likely dealing with an emotional issue!

If you feel as though anxiety or panic attacks are interfering with your life and relationships, you should start by consulting with your doctor or a mental health professional. Anxiety rarely gets better without treatment and it may even intensify if you do not seek help.

Anxiety is very treatable with early intervention. Most of the time it can be treated successfully through talk therapy. This is a process whereby a counselor guides you towards developing an understanding and awareness of the underlying thoughts that trigger anxiety, and then coaches you in relaxation and developing coping strategies.

What are some common types of anxiety?

- Social Anxiety - Fear of being scrutinized and judged by others Having a sense of impending danger or panic
- Separation Anxiety - Fear of separating from home or loves ones
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) - Unreasonable thoughts and fears that can lead to repetitive behaviors and intrusive thoughts
- Panic Attacks - Uncontrollable feelings of imminent danger or doom; feeling a need to escape; heart palpitations; sweaty palms; shallow breathing
- Phobias - Intense, irrational fear or aversion to something (such as germs, spiders, storms)

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Anxiety symptoms range from mild to severe and can include but, again, are not limited to:

- Feeling scared
- Having a sense of impending danger or panic
- Increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Sweating

What are some coping strategies?

- Identify stressors and possible triggers
- Replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk
- Control breathing -- take slower, measured breaths
- Eat healthy and exercise regularly
- Consult with a doctor or counselor

It is possible to train your brain to stay calm and to learn how to break the worrying habit.

You do not have to struggle with anxiety forever, yet learning to release anxiety does not happen overnight. Like anything worth doing in life, you will need a strong desire to change, a healthy dose of patience, a good teacher and mindfulness practice.

Recommended Readings:

Don't Panic: Third Edition: Taking Control of Anxiety by Reid Wilson

Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children by Reid Wilson



Michelle Kelley, LCSW is a licensed counselor and the owner of Girls Stand Strong, a professional counseling practice in Warrenton, Virginia. Michelle specializes in helping girls and women develop the self-confidence and self-esteem they need to achieve their goals and realize their dreams. Through her speaking engagements, workshops, and counseling--Michelle provides girls and women with the essential tools to select and cultivate healthy friendships and relationships. Such positive relationships foster a strong emotional well-being and successful social lives. Please visit www.GirlsStandStrong.com or call 703.505.2413 for additional information.