



CENTERSTONE

Wellness Program

Overcoming Anxiety

Do you constantly worry? In today's dismal economic climate, your anxiety may be at an all time high. Whether you're watching your retirement savings shrink, fretting about how to pay for college, worrying about a possible layoff or happily employed but nervously following the news, these are anxiety-provoking times.

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stressful and uncertain situations. It's your body's way of telling you to stay alert and protect yourself. But how much anxiety is too much?

If you experience worry and irrational fears for hours a day, can't sleep or perform usual tasks, then you may have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in America, affecting 40 million adults.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety becomes unhealthy when it stops pushing you to act. This can happen either because you are worried about things out of your control, worried about things that have not happened yet or paralyzed by the stress and anxiety you feel, rather than being inspired to act.

People with anxiety disorders may experience constant worry, anticipation of danger, lack of control, difficulty concentrating and physical restlessness.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a pattern of frequent, constant worry and anxiety over many different events and activities. GAD is very different from normal anxiety you may feel about the current recession or any other stressful event. GAD is not triggered by a specific situation. Even in the best of times, GAD affects 6.8 million American adults. Women are twice as likely to be affected.

People with generalized anxiety disorder experience persistent, excessive and unrealistic worry about issues like money, health, family or work for six months or longer. They don't know how to stop the worry cycle, which they feel is beyond their control. Physical symptoms of GAD may include fatigue, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, irritability, muscle tension, gastrointestinal discomfort or diarrhea.

Panic Attacks

Unmanaged anxiety disorders can lead to panic attacks. Panic attacks are a brief period of intense fear or discomfort. People who have panic attacks experience sweating, trembling, palpitations, feelings of choking, chest pain, nausea, dizziness and fear of losing control, all in a short period of time. In panic disorder, there is persistent worry and concern about the attacks and changes in behavior related to the attacks. Women are twice as likely to be affected as men. It is common for individuals who have panic attacks to also have major depression.

Treatment for Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders can be effectively treated with psychotherapy, medication or a combination of both. Cognitive-behavioral therapy, or CBT, is a short-term form of psychotherapy. It focuses on identifying, understanding and modifying thinking and behavior patterns. CBT actively involves individuals in their own recovery and imparts skills that are useful throughout life. Because CBT teaches skills for handling anxiety, people can use them when needed, which helps those with GAD learn to control anxiety on their own.

Medication does not cure anxiety disorders, but it can help manage symptoms while an individual undergoes psychotherapy. Many medications used to treat depression are also effective for anxiety disorders. If your doctor prescribes an anti-depressant, you will need to take it for several weeks before symptoms start to fade. Work with your doctor to find the treatment option that works best for you.

In addition to psychotherapy and medication, there are six tactics you can use to help manage anxiety.

- Recognize your reaction
- Put stress in perspective
- Take responsibility
- Take a time-out
- Seek help

Try to determine what specifically causes you to worry. Take time to sort through your feelings, and recognize your fear-based reactions when “what if” thoughts begin. Put stress in perspective by accepting that you can’t control everything. Take responsibility by coming up with a plan to tackle the part of the problem that is under your control. Perhaps you can change your routine or schedule in order to feel in control of your life. Take a time-out from your overactive thoughts and concerns. Take a deep breath. Rest well. Eat well. Welcome humor, and maintain a positive attitude. Practice yoga, listen to music, volunteer or get a massage. Stepping back from the problem will let you clear your head.

Finally, counseling can help! Counseling involves talking with a trained mental health professional to learn how to deal with issues like anxiety disorders. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact Centerstone, at (615) 460-HELP.

For a free anxiety checklist, visit: http://centerstone.org/assets/2008/10/17/anxiety_checklist.pdf

Centerstone (615) 460-HELP (4357)

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), a not-for-profit organization is the nation’s largest provider of community-based behavioral healthcare. With a history that spans over fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to more than 69,000 individuals of all ages and their families annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs in more than 120 facilities and 150 partnership locations in Tennessee and Indiana. Centerstone is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) in Tennessee and The Joint Commission in Indiana. For more information about Centerstone, please call toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone’s wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone’s Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, “Homicide Response.” Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.