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Let's Not be Anxious About Anxiety

Who isn't anxious these days? There is, after all, plenty to be worried about. Will I have enough money to cover my bills? Will my health insurance pay for the procedure that my doctor tells me I need to have? Will my son/daughter succeed in school? We have financial fears, health worries, social and relationship concerns, and, of course, one only needs to read or hear the news, to feel uneasy about global problems. The list can seem to be endless.

Still, some anxiety is useful and healthy. It makes us work harder, play harder and live more intensely. It helps us to appreciate the good in life as well. However, too much anxiety can be problematic and it is important to know the difference.

Anxiety disorders affect more than 40 million adults in the United States (18% of the population).

Anxiety is considered to be a disorder – that is, a condition that may need treatment – when it lasts beyond the expected time frame and when it is out of proportion with the situation. For example, a little anxiety before travel or taking an exam is to be expected. Usually, this kind of anxiety dissipates as the presenting situation passes. However, anxiety that is unending and disturbs functioning – sleeping, eating, working – can be a sign that professional assistance is warranted.

Under the overall umbrella of anxiety disorders are the following: generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, phobias,

social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic disorder.

Symptoms of an anxiety disorder include irregular heartbeat (palpitations), excessive sweating or flushing, irritable mood, headaches and disturbances in usual eating and sleeping behaviors.

It is important to have a physical exam when anxiety becomes problematic. There can be physical explanations for the anxiety which must be treated by a physician. Mental health professionals can also be helpful in assisting with anxiety symptoms and interventions.

If physical explanations are ruled out, the common treatments for anxiety disorder include some or all of the following: therapy that focuses on developing alternative coping mechanisms for the anxiety feelings, relaxation therapy, and medication.

Our fast-paced, competitive culture is not very supportive of those who suffer from mental disorders. As a result, there is a tendency to deny or avoid dealing with these problems. However, the usual result is that they get worse, rather than better. If you recognize yourself or someone you love as potentially suffering from undue anxiety, please call an EASE counselor. We will listen to you and support you and we can, at least, help you to determine what your next step might be.

