

Anxiety & Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Module

About Anxiety & Panic Attacks

- Anxiety symptoms occur across a range of normal and symptomatic conditions.
- Everyone has anxiety at one time or another.
- Everyday anxiety is called “worry.”
- We all at times worry about our children, the bills, work, relationships, and so on.
- Worry is not something we normally “worry about” as a symptom.
- However, when worry becomes so constant or intrusive that it interferes with sleep or relationships or work then it becomes anxiety.
- Think of anxiety like a speedometer: when it gets higher and higher it becomes increasingly dangerous and out of control.
- The diagnoses and the conditions in which anxiety occurs are extensive, and here is a short list:
 - Panic disorder (the mother of all anxiety disorders) – an intense overwhelming with a need to flee
 - PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
 - Eating Disorders
 - Depression
 - Bipolar Disorder
 - Schizophrenia
- In other words any psychiatric disorder can have an anxiety symptoms.
- However when anxiety is added on top of another psychiatric symptom the distress levels are much greater and the need for treatment is greater.
- When anxiety occurs in the context of another Psychiatric disorder the treatment is often different depending on the condition.

- Anxiety is Anxiety is Anxiety, but the context in which the anxiety occurs often makes the medication options for treatment different.
- However, the CBT Cognitive Behavioral Therapy strategies are often the same across the spectrum of disorders in which anxiety is a symptom.

The Basics About Anxiety & Panic Attacks

Below you'll find information about anxiety and Panic Attacks as well as equally important misconceptions about anxiety and Panic Attacks.

- Perhaps the greatest misconception about anxiety and Panic Attacks is that we bring them on ourselves (we feel guilty that we have this problem) and that it is a sign of weakness and that we are to blame for having them; those misconceptions lead many people suffering with anxiety and Panic Attacks to suffer alone and avoid seeking help.
- Nothing could be further from the truth: no one would choose to have anxiety and Panic Attacks; no one suffering anxiety and Panic Attacks should suffer silently blaming themselves and avoiding help.
- However because anxiety and Panic Attacks emanate from our brains we erroneously believe that we have brought this on ourselves (more on that later).
- Anxiety and Panic Attacks are as much a biological disorder of the part of the brain that regulates the “anxiety response” as is high blood pressure a biological disorder of the arteries and kidneys; both are disorders of biological “dysregulation.”
- The anxiety centers are discrete areas of the brain similar to other discrete biological regions of the brain that regulate sleep and waking and breathing and sexual functioning and so on.
- Here is a link to a recent publication of a study about the “disease” model of anxiety and Panic Attacks; namely that sufferers of anxiety and Panic Attacks have an underlying biological process that causes them to have severe anxiety and Panic Attacks: the title of the article is - “People with anxiety may be hardwired to see the world differently;” if you put that in your browser many news sites will link to the following link which

happens to be from Reuters; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-anxiety-idUSKCN0W92BJ>

- This study actually confirms what our patients suffering from anxiety and Panic Attacks have told us for many years - that they started having severe anxiety or Panic Attacks from at early age; they have family histories of parents or siblings who had anxiety and Panic Attacks; the presence of strong family history implies a biological basis (genetics) of anxiety and Panic Attacks.
- Human and mammal brains have a functioning “anxiety response” center which we call the “flight or fight response;” people with anxiety and Panic Attacks have a hyperactive “anxiety response.”
- However, and this is most important, even though suffers of anxiety and Panic Attacks are “biologically predisposed” to anxiety the process of “learning” what to be anxious about is just that - a “learned” process rather than a biological process; in other words anxiety is hardwired and biological but what you are anxious about is something you learned along the way; and as we discuss below - “what you learn you can unlearn.”
- The misconceptions of self blame and weakness of character as the cause of anxiety and Panic Attacks are important to recognize because those misconceptions are the greatest obstacles to getting treatment.
- People suffering from anxiety and Panic Attacks believe many of the following thoughts:
 - I am a smart (or successful, etcetera) and this should not be happening to me (“there must be something wrong with me.”)
 - I have been able to handle other things why can’t I handle the Panic Attacks.
- The reason for the guilt and self-blame is that we often feel guilty for negative events in our lives over which we have control.
- What is so unfortunate about all this self stigma is that anxiety can be successfully treated.
- How has our understanding of anxiety changed in recent years? We now see anxiety as the root cause of OCD Obsessive Compulsive Symptoms and of Eating Disorders; we now understand that anxious thoughts lead to OCD Obsessive Compulsive Symptoms which are behavioral attempts

to manage anxious thoughts and feelings; and likewise we now understand that anxious thoughts lead to eating disorders for the same reason- to manage anxious thoughts and feelings.