

## **What is Anxiety?**

Everyone has feelings of anxiety at certain times in their life which is perfectly normal e.g. attending court or coming into prison for the first time. Those suffering from anxiety have difficulties managing worrying thoughts which has a debilitating affect on their life.

Stress is not an anxiety disorder; it is a response to a particular situation or thought. It is a normal and automatic response to perceived danger, either physical or psychological, known as the "fight-or-flight" response. Chronic stress can lead to health problems such as increased blood pressure, a suppressed immune system, and cardiovascular risks. It can also make you more vulnerable to anxiety disorders

## ***Types of Anxiety***

There are a range of Anxiety Disorders; below we will focus on the most common:

### **Generalised Anxiety Disorder**

Those diagnosed with GAD with present with a range of symptoms but may be unable to identify a specific cause or trigger.

### **Specific Phobias**

A phobia can be defined as an unrelenting fear of a situation, activity or thing. It is estimated around 28 in every 100 people suffer from a specific phobia. Many phobias go largely unreported as sufferers find ways to avoid the phobia. Specific phobias include agoraphobia- fear of open spaces, claustrophobia- fear of small spaces (You may have experienced this the first time in a cell) rare phobias include fear of clowns.

### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

PTSD is a reaction to a traumatic event, most people in time will deal with traumatic events but for some sufferers this may set off a reaction which may last for a long period of time and will require access to support. Those in front line services, i.e. Service men, fire fighters may be more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD. Many establishments provide support through Veterans in custody officer.

### **Obsessive Compulsive disorders**

Those diagnosed with OCD may feel the need to carry out certain tasks in a ritualistic way or a certain amount of times; this may be accompanied by thoughts of what will happen if the rituals are not adhered to. Other OCD may include hand washing to get rid of germs, checking and needing to carry out a task a certain number of times.

## **Panic Disorders**

Those experiencing panic disorders or panic attacks, sufferers may feel they come out of the blue without and prior warning. Symptoms include tightening of the chest increased heart rate, sweating. Sufferers may feel they are having a heart attack.

## ***Possible causes***

It is not possible to give one definite cause for anxiety but rather factors which contribute to an individual suffering from anxiety disorders. As with Depression causes can usually be categorised into 3 main groups, biological/ genetics, psychological and social.

### **Genetics**

There is evidence that anxiety disorders run in families. If parents or other close relatives have an anxiety disorder, children are at higher risk of developing an anxiety disorder in the future.

Being raised in a family where fear and anxiety are shown on a constant day to day basis can affect a person in adulthood. The brain and its learned behavior is inherited which is reason enough to believe anxiety is heredity

### **Psychological**

- History of abuse
- Personality predisposition

### **Social**

- Relationship breakdowns
- Financial worries
- Substance misuse

## **Symptoms**

Some of the common symptoms of Anxiety as follows:

- Physical symptoms
- Heart palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pains
- Headaches
- Aches and pains
- Tummy upsets
- Dry mouth
- Sweating

**Some of the more severe symptoms are:**

- Stomach ulcers

Psychological symptoms

- Feelings of doom and gloom
- Feelings of panic
- Feeling that you might faint
- Everything slowing down or speeding up
- Feeling you might die
- Flashbacks
- Vivid dreams/ Night terrors

## **Treatments**

Treatments on offer differ from establishment to establishment. Some prisons may have in patient facilities with 24 hour specialist mental health support, others may have Primary mental health services or dual trained nurses.

Treatments offered usually fall into medication, Psychological treatments or holistic/ alternative therapies.

Individuals may be offered medication – Antidepressants or antipsychotics may be given in severe cases and be monitored by mental health staff.

Psychological treatments may include CBT, Cognitive behavioural therapy which helps to understand thought & behaviour. Developments now include computer CBT and telephone

support via IAPT services. Counselling which helps to identify different ways of dealing with problems. Hypnotherapy has been useful in some cases.

Holistic or Alternative treatments may include gym or fitness programmes, meditation, and aromatherapy. Yoga has been shown to be of particular benefit to those with anxiety disorders. The phoenix trust provides free publications to enable individuals to practice workouts in their own cells. Some establishments facilitate group yoga or anxiety management and relaxation sessions.

### ***Differences with Males & Females***

Women are twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders; this may be due to hormonal changes including childbirth and menopause. Men tend not to talk about their concerns until crisis situations frequently displaying irritable behaviour or conflict, men also tend to focus on the physical aspects or symptoms of anxiety.

### **Further information**

[www.anxiety.org.uk](http://www.anxiety.org.uk) is a national charity which provides a helpline staffed by those with a personal experience and a peer mentoring scheme operates in the Manchester area.

[www.ppt.org.uk](http://www.ppt.org.uk) encourages prisoners in their spiritual lives through the practice of yoga and meditation.

[www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk) Provide support to veterans & families of those suffering psychological injuries.