

Anxiety and Phobias

“If Your Own Mind is Lying to You, You Need Another Opinion”

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What is the difference between occasionally feeling anxious and an anxiety disorder or phobia? We all get anxious once a while: public speaking, going on a first date, interviewing for a job, taking a test; all of these things are common anxiety producing events.

The difference between normal and abnormal or clinical anxiety is threefold:

1. Frequency and duration: typical anxiety is occasional, not frequent. It normally occurs around “first times” when engaging in new behaviors, such as the ones listed above. It does not last beyond the initial experience and is not relived in anxiety-producing memories. For typical anxiety, when the “first time” experience is over, the feeling of anxiety is over.
2. Causally Connected: Normal anxiety has some logical basis to it, as in “I am afraid of failing this test and if I fail this test I can’t get the job I want.” Normal anxiety responds—and decreases—in response to thinking through the alternatives and ways to alleviate the feared outcome, as in “if I fail the test I will need to study harder and take it again in three months. It will be a disappointment and inconvenient, but it will not be the end of the world.”
3. Life-Interference level: normal anxiety may give a person pause and the occasional pounding heart, but it does not prevent them from pursuing their goals. Abnormal or clinical anxiety is a bully: it blocks opportunities such as work, leisure, romance, travel, and wellbeing of the sufferer. Abnormal anxiety lies, making the sufferer believe “I can’t” instead of “this is tough and it will take some work to get through.”

This definition applies to generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), agoraphobia (fear of leaving a specific and familiar area such as home or neighborhood), as well as to many more specific anxieties such as fear of flying, social anxiety, or any of the myriad of phobias that people have endured.

Vital and life-preserving fears, such as the fear of walking into the street without looking both ways, or the fear of breaking the law due to the possibility of getting caught, may or may not qualify as anxieties, depending on how frequently they are thought about.

What treatment options exist?

There are many treatment options available to the anxiety sufferer. Therapy, including EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing), cognitive behavioral, exposure and systematic desensitization are all beneficial. Medication may be extremely helpful as well.

Helpful things you can do for yourself:

1. Make an appointment with a licensed and experienced therapist. Having professional support that you can trust is vital for overcoming anxiety. **If your own mind is lying to you, you need another opinion.** My number is 206 375-7690
2. Think of the anxiety as separate and distinct from yourself. **You are not your anxiety, anymore than you are the flu when you are sick.**
3. Talk back to the anxiety. Ask yourself “what’s the worst thing that could happen?” “What is the likelihood of that happening?” “What can I do if that happens?”
4. Deliberately expose yourself to the very thing you are afraid of. **It is very hard for your anxiety to convince you that you cannot do something when you have just done it.**

Anxiety can be an extremely painful, debilitating condition. Left untreated it can become increasingly consuming. But help is available and an appointment for help is a phone call away. Mental health means living a life of choice, free from the compulsions and fears of anxiety disorders.