



Clinical Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy Association Ltd Information Sheet No. 1: Anxiety

Understanding Anxiety

Most people experience some form of general anxiety at various times during their life. Anxiety is perfectly normal before an important job interview, for instance, or an exam. It's when anxiety takes over a person's life that real problems begin.

Anxiety is defined as the unpleasant state of psychological dread and physical tension brought about by a person's real or imagined perception of danger. (1)

There are several types of anxiety including generalised anxiety, which is a persistent fear or worry that can occur at any time and does not appear to be triggered by any one thing.

Other forms include social anxiety, which is a specific fear of public encounters and in particular of observation, scrutiny and embarrassment. Panic attacks also count as a type of anxiety, where a short burst of a feeling of losing control combines with physical symptoms such as trembling, dizziness and heart palpitations. Phobias and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are also defined as forms of anxiety.

How it affects you

People suffering from anxiety are characterised as expecting bad events to occur, whether it's in work, at school or during a social function. It stands to reason this constant state of preparedness for disaster will eventually take a huge mental toll.

When the body experiences anxiety our breathing rate increases, which can lead to breathlessness, pain in the chest, gastric problems and, in some cases, choking. When the breathing rate increases supply of blood to the brain decreases, which can lead to numerous problems including dizziness, confusion and blurred vision. An anxious person can sometimes feel trapped by their condition, displaying telltale signs like shivering, bodily tension and foot tapping.

Sometimes anxiety causes sleeplessness or excess of sleep while stress also causes bad dreams. For some people anxiety leads to depression and thoughts of suicide.

How Hypnotherapy can help

Hypnotherapy helps people suffering from anxiety by equipping them with tools, such as positive visualisation and physical relaxation techniques, to manage their symptoms and reduce the onset of anxiety.

Numerous clinical trials have found that hypnotherapy is a proven method for reducing anxiety in patients. "The research provides compelling evidence that hypnosis is an efficacious treatment for state anxiety and anxiety-related disorders, such as headaches and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)." (2)

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In fact, people who suffer from IBS, which is commonly thought to result from anxiety, benefit greatly from hypnotherapy. Standard treatment for IBS focuses on the management or alleviation of the predominant symptoms, such as diarrhoea or constipation, often using pharmacological therapy. For many patients, this approach is unsatisfactory, and patients frequently seek the advice of complementary and alternative medicine practitioners in order to explore other treatment options.

Hypnotherapy has the strongest supportive evidence as a beneficial mind-body intervention for IBS. Clinical studies of hypnotherapy have uniformly shown improvement of gastrointestinal symptoms, anxiety, depression and quality of life in patients. (3)

While the effectiveness of hypnotherapy is sometimes doubted, the wealth of evidence provided by the medical community supporting it as a method of improving patients' lives is growing. In a 2007 study the authors concluded that on the clinical trial results available and applying the rules of evidence-based medicine, hypnotherapy should be supported as an effective mind-body therapy. (4)

People suffering from anxiety and insomnia were cited as the main beneficiaries of hypnotherapy, as well as patients experiencing nausea and vomiting induced by chemotherapy.

In conclusion the use of hypnotherapy is extremely effective and can generate positive results for people suffering from anxiety.

References

- (1) Carlson, N.R., (2007) *Physiology of Behavior* (9th Ed); Allyn and Bacon.
- (2) Hammond, DC., (2010) *Hypnosis in the treatment of anxiety- and stress-related disorders*; University of Utah School of Medicine
- (3) Kearney, DJ & Brown-Chang, J, (2008) *Complementary and alternative medicine for IBS in adults*; University of Washington School of Medicine, Gastroenterology Section
- (4) Ernst, E & Pittler, MH & Wider, B & Boddy, K, (2007) *Mind-body therapies: are the trial data getting stronger?*

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