

Healthy Thoughts: Coping With an Anxiety Disorder

Provided by ERH Parish Health Ministry

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“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.”
(Psalm 94:19)

How common are anxiety disorders?

Everyone experiences anxiety during some point in their lives. However, when feelings of intense fear and distress are overwhelming and prevent us from doing everyday things, an anxiety disorder may be the cause. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) estimates that 40 million adults in the U.S. or 18% have an anxiety disorder. It is helpful to understand that there are different types of anxiety disorders in order to cope with them or help a loved one.

Types of anxiety disorders:

- **Panic disorder:** Characterized by panic attacks, sometimes striking repeatedly and without warning. Often mistaken for a heart attack, a panic attack can cause powerful physical symptoms including chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath and stomach upset. Many people will go to desperate measures to keep from having an attack, including social isolation or avoiding going to specific places.
- **Phobias:** For someone with a phobia, certain places, events, or objects can create powerful reactions of strong, irrational fear. To avoid panicking, someone with specific phobias will work hard to avoid certain triggers. Depending on the type and number of those triggers, this fear and the attempt to control it can seem to take over a person's life.
- **Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD):** Produces chronic, exaggerated worrying about everyday life. This can consume hours each day, making it hard to concentrate or finish routine daily tasks. A person with GAD may become exhausted by worry and experience headaches, tension or nausea.

- **Social anxiety disorder:** Unlike shyness, this disorder causes intense fear, often driven by irrational worries about social humiliation, “saying something stupid,” or “not knowing what to say.” Someone with social anxiety disorder may not participate in conversations, contribute to class discussions, or offer their ideas, and may become isolated.

Coping strategies to treat or lessen symptoms of anxiety:

- Stress and relaxation techniques, meditation, prayer, breathing exercises
- Practicing mindfulness
- Exercise
- Self-management (i.e., allowing yourself short periods of time for worry) to gain better control of emotions
- Antianxiety and/or antidepressant medications
- Psychotherapy, counseling, self-help groups
- Reduction of caffeinated drinks/food
- Avoidance of certain over-the-counter or herbal remedies that may increase anxiety

For more information, contact the NAMI Information Helpline at 800-950-NAMI (6264).

Source: www.namiswoh.org



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Healthy Thoughts: Spirituality and Mental Health

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“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

For many years spirituality and religion were not integrated in the treatment plan of those living with mental illness. But today, many psychologists are beginning to recognize the important role spirituality plays in the lives of their patients and their healing journeys.

Mental health and wellness involves several areas of our lives. “Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being.”¹ Our state of mental wellness affects how we respond to others and how we make decisions.

Spirituality is the vehicle by which we relate to God and to others. Connectedness to something much greater than ourselves and then sharing this connection or love with those in our path is the call of the Christian faith. Christ came that we may experience wholeness. This integration of spirituality and religion in the treatment plan of those who have a mental health issue can intensify their connectedness to God. Asking God to be present during a crisis will bring comfort. Such comfort tells individuals that they are not alone and there is hope. Hope is an essential component to any journey of recovery.

Responding to the question “What makes religion and spirituality special?” Kenneth I. Pargament, Ph.D., noted expert in psychology of religion and spirituality, stated, “Unlike any other dimension of life, religion and spirituality have a unique focus on the domain of the sacred — transcendence, ultimate truth, finitude and deep connectedness. Any psychology that overlooks these parts of life remains incomplete.”²

What are some tools one can use to experience the PEACE of God?

- **Presence:** Get in the presence of God in a quiet place and meditate on Him.
- **Encourage yourself to follow your treatment plan with your physician, counselor or psychologist.** Take the

medication as directed and take care of your body with proper exercise and nutrition.

- **Accept yourself for who you are and love yourself as God loves you.**
- **Comfort:** Experience the comfort of God so you can one day share this comfort with others.
- **Experience the love of God in whatever way brings you peace (i.e., through reading the Bible, prayer, journaling, singing hymns, PrayerWalking, or listening to the birds sing).**

How can the church help those with mental health issues feel safe?

- **Learn all you can about mental health.** Encourage one another to become trained in Mental Health First Aid.
- **Organize discussions on the topic of mental health or open space for mental health support groups.**
- **Value the insight and blessing you will receive by being present and listening to the experience of a person with a mental issue or their family members.**
- **Empathize with those who are experiencing a mental health crisis and their family members.**

Sources:

- ¹What is Mental Health? MentalHealth.gov, U.S. Department of Health & Human Service. June 5, 2015.
- ² Pargament, Kenneth I., Ph.D., “What Role Do Religion and Spirituality Play in Mental Health?” www.apa.org., American Psychological Association. June 5, 2015.



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