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Page No : 11

Understanding Diabetes: Tips for Achieving Optimal Health

Page No : 24

BE BREAST AWARE

UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY: CAUSES, SYMPTOMS, AND TREATMENT

Have you ever experienced an increased heart rate during public speaking or social functions? Many People deal with anxiety in their daily life.

Introduction:

In today's world, anxiety has become a part of life. People worry by thinking about money, health, and relationships. Extreme stress can affect your school activities and job performance. It is normal to feel anxious while going for an interview or attending a test. Anxiety helps in noticing a dangerous situation, and sharper our attention. Anxiety disorders are mental health conditions characterized by fear, nervousness, apprehension, and worry. [1]

Features of anxiety disorder:

Risk factors: [1]

- Feeling shy in new situations in childhood
- Stressful events in life
- History of mental disorders in family
- Health conditions such as thyroid disorders or cardiac arrhythmia can aggravate anxiety

Causes:

- Change in brain structure: A part of your brain called amygdala plays an important role in managing anxiety. There will be increased amygdala activity in people with anxiety.
- Imbalances in hormones such as dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin, and gamma-aminobutyric acid.
- There is an increased risk of developing anxiety if your parents/siblings have an anxiety disorder.
- Exposure to a traumatic event
- Suffering stress over an extended period.

Continuous negative thought patterns can predispose to anxiety

Symptoms: [2]

• Physiological symptoms:

- ✓ Shortness of breath
- ✓ Increased heart rate
- ✓ Palpitations
- ✓ Chest pain
- ✓ Choking
- ✓ Nausea
- ✓ Diarrhea
- ✓ Tingling sensation in arms and legs

• Cognitive symptoms:

- ✓ Frightening mental images/ memories
- ✓ Lack of concentration
- ✓ Confusion
- ✓ Poor memory
- ✓ Difficulty in public speaking

• Behavioral symptoms:

- ✓ Agitation
- ✓ Restlessness
- ✓ Hyperventilation

Types of anxiety disorders: [2, 3]

- ➢ **Separation anxiety disorder:** There is continuous fear of loss of or detachment from loved ones. Individuals experience nightmares and physical symptoms. The symptoms that are slowly developed in childhood tend to be expressed in adulthood.
- ➢ **Selective mutism:** It is characterized by the inability to speak in social situations where there is expectation. The individual can speak in other situations. It is more commonly observed in young children than in adults.
- ➢ **Specific Phobia:** Individuals with phobia are anxious about certain situations or specific objects.
- ➢ **Social anxiety disorder:** The individual is anxious about being rejected, embarrassed, or humiliated. It is characterized by intense fear of social situations.
- ➢ **Panic disorder:** Individuals experience panic attacks, and they live in a constant fear of facing another episode of panic attack. The physical symptoms include sweating, palpitations, and fear of dying.
- ➢ **Agoraphobia:** Individuals feel anxious about being in spaces like theatres, or outside of home. The individual thinks that help might not be available
- ➢ **Generalized anxiety disorder:** The individual is anxious about school performance, or work that is difficult to control. The individual will be restless, blank, and easily fatigued.

- **Substance/medication-induced anxiety disorder:** Symptoms develop due to substance intoxication, or withdrawal.
- **Anxiety disorders due to other medical conditions** such as hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, heart failure, etc.

Diagnosis: [2]

The healthcare provider does a complete physical examination and enquires about your medical history and medications. A blood test can rule out an underlying health condition, such as hyperthyroidism. The mental health professional can conduct an interview, or survey to know symptoms, sleeping habits, and other behaviors. A diagnosis is provided based on:

- The intensity, and duration of symptoms
- How the symptoms interfere with your everyday life
- Evaluation of your behavior

Treatment: [4]

The treatment includes a combination of psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy.

Pharmacotherapy:

- **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors:** These drugs are considered as first-line treatment options.
- **Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors:** These drugs are particularly used for generalized anxiety disorder.
- **Tricyclic antidepressants (Amitryptiline):** These drugs can be used, but have significant adverse effects.
- **Benzodiazepines:** These drugs promote muscle relaxation, and reduce muscular tension. These drugs can be used for panic attacks.
- **Mild tranquilizers:** These drugs cause less sedation and minimal withdrawal symptoms.
- **Beta-blockers:** Control the symptoms of anxiety such as dizziness, increased heart rate, and trembling voice. These drugs are particularly used for social phobia.

Psychotherapy: [2]

Cognitive behavioral therapy: This treatment approach helps to identify negative thought patterns and behaviors. After identifying the thoughts, you can work on changing your reactions to triggering circumstances.

Conclusion: [5]

Anxiety is a common problem faced by the majority of people in the world. It is undiagnosed and is associated with adverse effects. Anxiety is managed by an interprofessional team of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and mental health nurses. Awareness must be created among family members to monitor symptoms and provide support. Some individuals with anxiety have suicidal tendencies. Collaboration among team members is essential to ensure that all patients receive proper care and treatment.

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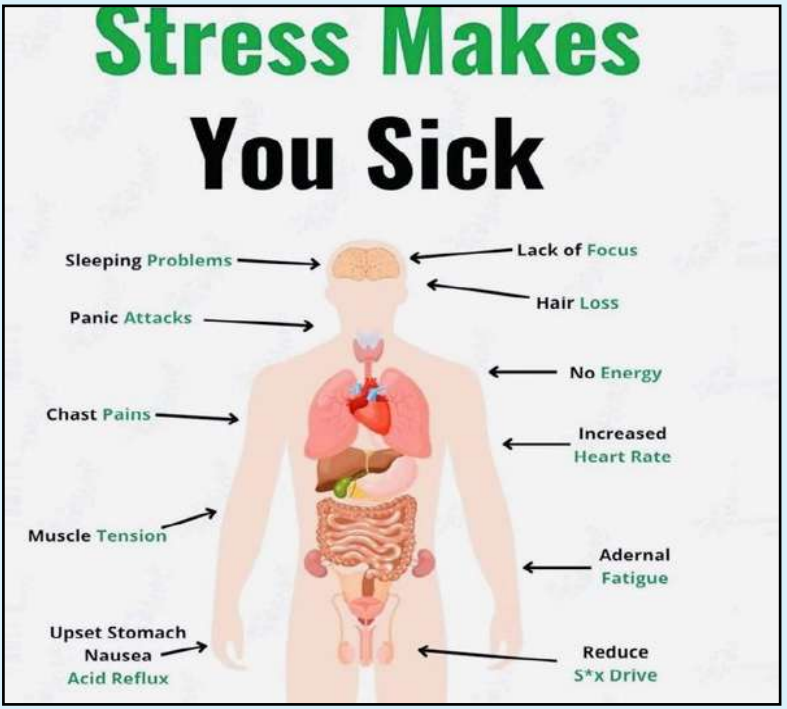

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