

# Living with ADHD: 'A' is for Anxiety

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# What are Anxiety Disorders?

- Normal anxiety comes and goes in response to real challenges involving potential loss or failure. Normal anxiety helps sharpen your attention so you can meet those challenges.
- *Anxiety disorders* involved anxiety that is more intense or lasts longer than normal anxiety, or that leads to phobias. Basically, if you worry when there's no real threat, to the point where you can't function normally, that's an anxiety disorder.

# Some Definitions

- The ***state*** of being anxious is the physiological and emotional reaction to the current threat, whether that threat is real or imagined.
- The ***trait*** of being anxious is the deeper, more ingrained tendency to slip into the state. The trait of anxiety runs in families.

# Anxiety Disorders Defined by the DSM-IV

- Panic Disorder (with and without agoraphobia)
- Agoraphobia without history of Panic Disorder
- Social Phobia – exaggerated fear of embarrassment or humiliation
- Specific Phobia – eg of spiders, elevators, flying, etc.
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Acute Stress Disorder (symptoms < 30 days)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Anxiety Disorder due to a General Medical Condition
- Substance-induced Anxiety Disorder
- Anxiety Disorder Not Otherwise Specified

And for children, the DSM-IV includes

- Separation Anxiety Disorder

# Anxiety Disorders are Common

- Each year about 16% of the adult population will experience an anxiety disorder.
- That's about 30 million Americans.
- The numbers are higher for people with ADHD.  
In any given year,
  - About 25% of children with ADHD will also have an anxiety disorder.
  - Between 25% and 50% of adults with ADHD will also have an anxiety disorder.

# Under-Recognized and Under-Treated

- Only a minority of people who meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder receive any treatment for their anxiety.
- Why? Because neither the person nor their doctor recognize/acknowledge that anxiety is the source of the distress.
- Reasons that Anxiety Disorders go untreated:
  - People inadvertently normalize their abnormal anxiety.
  - People deny they have a problem.
  - Anxiety disorders generate a lot of physical symptoms so anxiety sufferers and their doctors often mistakenly believe they have a medical illness.

# Symptoms of Anxiety

- The primary symptoms of anxiety disorders are fear and worry.
- Sometimes these feelings are interpreted as chronic stress rather than anxiety.
- In either case, there are typically additional emotional and physical symptoms which may mask the primary issue of anxiety.
- According to the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, people with anxiety disorders are 3-5 times more likely to go to the doctor than non-sufferers.
- Be aware of the many forms anxiety can take!

# Emotional/Psychological Symptoms

- Apprehension, uneasiness, and dread
- Impaired concentration or selective attention
- Feeling restless or on edge
- Avoidance
- Hypervigilance
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Behavioral problems (especially in children and adolescents)
- Nervousness and jumpiness
- Self-consciousness and insecurity
- Fear that you are dying or going crazy
- Strong desire to escape

This specific list from [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/anxiety\\_types\\_symptoms\\_treatment.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/anxiety_types_symptoms_treatment.htm)

# Physical Symptoms

- Heart palpitations or racing heartbeat
- Chest pain
- Hot flashes or chills
- Cold and clammy hands
- Stomach upset or queasiness
- Frequent urination or diarrhea
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Dizziness
- Tremors, twitches, and jitters
- Muscle tension or aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Insomnia

This specific list from [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/anxiety\\_types\\_symptoms\\_treatment.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/anxiety_types_symptoms_treatment.htm)

# Anxiety Disorders and ADHD

- The types of anxiety disorders that show up more frequently in people with ADHD than in the general population are:
  - Social Phobia (Social Anxiety Disorder)
  - Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
  - Separation Anxiety Disorder (in children)
- And possibly
  - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- There seems to be a link between ADHD and PTSD. Adler et al (2004) studied vets and found that 36% of participants with PTSD met criteria for childhood ADHD and 28% met criteria for current ADHD. This is in contrast to vets with panic disorder of whom only 9% met criteria for childhood ADHD and 5% met criteria for current ADHD.

Adler LA, Kunz M, Chua HC, Rotrosen J, Resnick SG. (2004). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in adult patients with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): is ADHD a vulnerability factor? *Journal of Attention Disorders*. Aug;8(1):11-6.

# Separation Anxiety

- Onset before age 18 years. Characterized by excessive anxiety concerning separation from home or from those to whom a child is attached. The child may develop excessive worrying to the point of being reluctant or refusing to go to school, being alone, or sleeping alone. The child may also experience repeated nightmares and complaints of physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea, or vomiting.

Bottom line:

- 27% of ADHD kids
- 2.4% of children in the general population
- Genders are equally affected

# Social Phobia/Anxiety

- Also known as Social Anxiety Disorder or SAD. It is an intense fear of becoming humiliated in social situations, specifically of embarrassing yourself in front of other people. It often runs in families and may be accompanied by depression or alcoholism. Social phobia often begins in early adolescence or even younger. The person recognizes that the fear is excessive or unreasonable.
- Social Phobia is the third most common psychiatric disorder in the United States after depression and substance abuse

## Bottom Line:

- 18% of ADHD adults life time occurrence
- 13% of the general public life time occurrence (7% at any on time)
- Genders are equally affected

## Resources:

[www.socialphobia.org](http://www.socialphobia.org), [www.socialphobiaworld.com](http://www.socialphobiaworld.com), [www.socialfear.com](http://www.socialfear.com)

# General Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

- Characterized by 6 months or more of chronic, exaggerated worry and tension that is unfounded or much more severe than the normal anxiety most people experience. People with GAD usually expect the worst. They worry excessively about money, health, family, or work, even when there are no signs of trouble. They are unable to relax and often suffer from insomnia. Sometimes the source of the worry is hard to pinpoint. Simply the thought of getting through the day can provoke anxiety. GAD may also grow worse with stress. GAD often coexists with depression, substance abuse, and other anxiety disorders.

## Bottom Line:

- 25% vs 2.9-4.6% lifetime for children with ADHD vs the general population
- 52% vs 5% lifetime for adults with ADHD vs the general population
- 24-43% vs 3% in any year for adults with ADHD vs the general population
- Twice as common in women as in men.

# How to Recognize GAD

- People with GAD may experience a few symptoms or may be overwhelmed by many symptoms. The key signs of GAD are anxiety and worry that are difficult to control and have lasted for at least 6 months. In addition to excessive anxiety and worry, people with GAD have at least 3 of the following symptoms:
  - Restlessness or feeling on edge
  - Fatigue
  - Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
  - Irritability
  - Muscle tension
  - Difficulty sleeping

Some additional signs associated with GAD include:

- Symptoms associated with muscle tension, such as trembling, twitching, feeling shaky, and muscle aches and soreness.
- Physical symptoms such as clammy hands, dry mouth, sweating, nausea or diarrhea, an increased need to urinate, trouble swallowing, and an exaggerated response to being surprised.

# Why So Common in ADHD?

- Anxiety is a natural outcome of living with ADHD.
- Anxiety may also be a subconscious coping strategy:
  - Children with anxiety and ADHD are less likely to display off-task and hyperactive behavior and have longer reaction times than those children with pure ADHD. (Schatz and Rostain, 2006)
  - Automatic negative thoughts are both a source of anxiety and stimulating to the brain, particularly to the part of the brain most affected by ADHD
- If anxiety is a coping strategy, it will be harder to let go of unless replaced by something more effective.

Amen, DG. (2001). *Healing ADD: The breakthrough program that allows you to see and heal the 6 types of ADD*. Berkley Publishing. New York. p182

Schatz DB, Rostain AL. (2006) ADHD with comorbid anxiety: a review of the current literature. *Journal of Attention Disorders*;10:141-149.

# Anxiety, Depression, and ADHD

- Once you are dealing with clinically significant anxiety, depression is often a factor. Studies show that if a person has an anxiety disorder, odds are about even that they will also at some point experience significant depression.
- Barkley (2008) also points out that the higher the level of ADHD symptoms in a person, the greater the lifetime risk for depression and anxiety disorders.

# What Can You Do?

- Recognize the possibility of a co-occurring Anxiety Disorder (and depression).
- Get educated.
- Make some supportive life style changes.
- Develop some stress reducing habits.
- If these don't make enough of a difference, consider seeing a clinical specialist for therapy and treatment. Such interventions might include:
  - Medication
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

# Home Remedies

- Before, or in addition to seeking treatment from a specialist, there are things you can do on your own to lower your anxiety and stress levels.
- The following are *options*. No one will be able to make all of these changes. Just pick the ones that are easiest and most natural for you to adopt into your life. Experiment. See what works for *YOU*.

# Exercise

If you haven't yet, you have to read John Ratey's brand new book:  
***Spark: the revolutionary new science of exercise and the brain.***

In it he explains that:

- Exercise reduces *anxiety sensitivity* by teaching you that you have control over the symptoms of racing heart, sweating, and elevated breathing. That feeling this way physically is not the same thing as a panic attack.
- Exercise reduces the *state* of anxiety by helping to relax the body, reducing the resting tension of the muscles and thus interrupting the anxiety feedback loop to the brain.
- Exercise reduces the *state* of anxiety by releasing serotonin, the “feel good” neurochemical, and GABA, an important inhibitory neurochemical that basically gives the command to “stand down”.
- Exercise reduces the *trait* of anxiety by helping the body and mind to unlearn the habit of anxiety.

# Better Sleep

- Stress and anxiety may cause the body to produce a "no sleep" signal in the brain that heightens arousal and makes sleep difficult. This alerting effect is also a cause of more anxiety and may set in motion a cycle of sleeplessness and stress.
- There is a lot of information on the web about sleep, sleep problems, and how to develop better sleep patterns. Try these resources:
  - <http://www.sleepfoundation.org>
  - [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain\\_basics/understanding\\_sleep.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain_basics/understanding_sleep.htm)
  - <http://science.education.nih.gov/supplements/nih3/sleep/guide/info-sleep.htm>

# Dietary Changes

- The big things to do in terms of diet are to:
  - cut down on the caffeine
  - mind your blood sugar (avoid hypoglycemia)
- There are experts who advocate for all sorts of supplements and herbs as well, but if this is the route you want to go, consult an alternative care doctor or nutritionist.

# Caffeine

- Spurs the physiological states that precipitate anxiety.
  - Caffeine increases norepinephrine in our brains, which leaves us alert and awake.
  - Caffeine heightens sympathetic nervous system activity and adrenaline output in the same way that stress does.
- Cut your caffeine to less than 100 mg per day. That's about what you'll get in 1 cup of coffee.
- You can find the caffeine content of various beverages here: <http://www.energyfiend.com/the-caffeine-database>
- From Bourne, E. and Garano, L. (2003) *Coping with Anxiety: 10 Simple Ways to Relieve Anxiety, Fear, and Worry*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

# Hypoglycemia

- The symptoms of hypoglycemia are similar to those of anxiety (light headedness, nervousness, trembling, irritability, palpitations).
- Stress can precipitate hypoglycemia and hypoglycemia can precipitate stress/anxiety.
- When your blood sugar crashes, your adrenal glands kick in and release adrenaline and cortisol, which causes you to feel even more anxious and arouse.
- To get off the blood sugar rollercoaster:
  - Eat more whole grains, vegetables, and whole fresh fruits (not dried fruit or juices which are too sugary)
  - Eat less sugary foods and refined grains (aka no “white food”: no white sugar, white flour, white rice, white potatoes)
  - Don’t go for more than 4-5 hours without eating and don’t eat more than 400-500 calories in a sitting.
- From Bourne, E. and Garano, L. (2003) *Coping with Anxiety: 10 Simple Ways to Relieve Anxiety, Fear, and Worry*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

# Down Time

- Down time is key: disengage from any task you consider work, put aside all responsibilities, and don't answer the phone unless you want to talk.
- Optimally you should build the following amounts of down time into your life:
  - One hour per day
  - One day per week
  - One week out of every 3-4 months.
- There are three kinds of down time:
  - Rest time is a time to just be. It's things like meditating or cat napping or soaking in a tub or listening to music. It's the down time you take so that you can get up afterwards and go full tilt again.
  - Recreation time brightens and uplifts your spirit. It's anything that is experienced as fun or play. It nourishes your soul so that you have the resources to do the things that are draining.
  - Relationship time is when you put aside your individual pursuits in order to enjoy being with another person or group of people. Having strong social support is important and often forgotten in our society that values rugged independence. Social support is well documented to help with all aspects of mental health.
- From Bourne, E. and Garano, L. (2003) *Coping with Anxiety: 10 Simple Ways to Relieve Anxiety, Fear, and Worry*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

# Relaxation Practices

- It's an established fact that if you relax the body, it will help relax the mind. By relaxing the body, we're sending signals to our brain that it can "stand down".
- The relaxation response. When this kicks in:
  - Your heart rate decreases
  - Breathing becomes slower and deeper
  - Blood pressure drops or stabilizes
  - Your muscles relax
  - And your anxiety level decreases

# Relaxation Exercises

- Autogenic training, promotes states of deep relaxation through the mental repetition of key phrases. Basically a person imagines being in a peaceful place with pleasant body sensations. The person focuses on the body and tries to make parts of the body feel heavy, warm, or cool. Breathing is centered and the heartbeat is regulated.
- Progressive muscle relaxation, in which a person focuses on tensing and relaxing each of the major muscle groups. It was introduced by the US physician Edmund Jacobson and was described in his book *Progressive Relaxation* (1938).
- CDs are available to help with some of these techniques:
  - *Progressive Relaxation & Autogenic Training* by Carolyn McManus

# Meditation

- Mindfulness meditation, in which a person concentrates on body sensations and thoughts that occur in the moment. The person learns to observe sensations and thoughts without judging them. (There are studies, particularly from the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA that show mindfulness meditation is particularly beneficial for people with ADHD <http://www.marc.ucla.edu/>)
- Yoga or walking meditation, which both come from Zen Buddhism and use physical discipline to focus the body and mind. Controlled breathing and slow, deliberate movements and postures are used.
- Transcendental meditation, in which a person focuses on a sound or thought. A word, mantra, or sound is repeated many times.
- CDs are available to help with some of these techniques:
  - *Mindfulness Meditation for ADD* by Katherine Wolfe [www.mindfulnessforadd.com](http://www.mindfulnessforadd.com)

# Biofeedback

- Biofeedback is often done with a trained and licensed therapist over time and at some expense.
- Here are a few ideas you could try at home:
  - StressEraser is a personal pulse meter that you can watch the wave form of your heart beat go by and follow its cues for deep breathing as well. [www.stresseraser.com](http://www.stresseraser.com)
  - Journey to Wild Divine and Healing Rhythms endorsed by Deepak Chopra, M.D., Dean Ornish, M.D., and Andrew Weil, M.D. Computer-based biofeedback programs in the form of games you control with your bioresponses. [www.wilddivine.com](http://www.wilddivine.com)
  - Alpha-Stim. A unit that passes very small amounts of alpha-waves across your brain, that helps entrain your brain's own alpha waves and put you quickly in an alert relaxed state much as meditation does. [www.alpha-stim.com](http://www.alpha-stim.com)

# Some Final Words...

- Studies show that if a person has an anxiety disorder, odds are about even that they will also at some point experience significant depression. Identifying and dealing with anxiety can help break this cycle.
- Anxiety is highly treatable. People can have a much higher quality of life and their anxiety-related disabilities significantly reduced through proper diagnosis and appropriate intervention.

# Resources on the Web

- Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
<http://www.adaa.org/>
- Anxiety Disorders—information from the NIMH  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/anxiety-disorders/complete-publication.shtml#pub7>
- *Practice Parameter for the Assessment and Treatment of Children and Adolescents With Anxiety Disorders*  
[http://www.aacap.org/galleries/PracticeParameters/JAACAP\\_Anxiety\\_2007.pdf](http://www.aacap.org/galleries/PracticeParameters/JAACAP_Anxiety_2007.pdf)

# Literature Reviews of ADHD and Comorbid Anxiety

- Brown, T. E. (2000). *Attention-deficit disorders and comorbidities in children adolescents, and adults*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- Pliszka, S. R., Carlson, C., & Swanson, J. M. (1999). *ADHD with comorbid disorders: Clinical assessment and management*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Schatz DB, Rostain AL. (2006) ADHD with comorbid anxiety: a review of the current literature. *Journal of Attention Disorders*;10:141-149. (available online at <http://jad.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/10/2/141>)