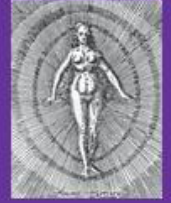


CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Stress and Anxiety by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.



"The Only Way Out is Through."
— Robert Frost

Living through ongoing stress and anxiety and recent difficult times takes a heavy toll on mood and health. It has been a tough year. A global pandemic, self-isolation, upheaval of everyday life, political and social turmoil, and natural disasters have overtaken all our lives. Personal traumas have changed lives forever and the stress may weigh heavily on your health, your mood and your spirit.



ANXIETY! What is it? It's our body-mind's experience that we're worried about the outcome.

"My heart beats too fast. My hands tremble and sweat. I feel like there's a weight on my chest. My stomach churns. I have terrible headaches. I can't sleep. Sometimes I can't even leave my house." Dr. Claire Weekes.

These common symptoms of anxiety are "minor" only to the people who don't suffer from them. But to the millions they affect, these problems make the difference between a happy, healthy life and one of crippling fear and frustration.

Case Study: Annette, 32, CEO of a large company, was caught in a trap. Not a financial one, an emotional one! . . . How to let go of early survival strategies?

Growing-up in a big family, everyone was busy working to make ends meet but no one was available to take charge of danger or crisis or just sit and talk, “shoot the breeze” when things were either good or bad. There was no one available to filter sensory information or mediate normal developmental issues. Although still a child needing a mother herself, Annette became the family mini mother, the heroine, the hub of the wheel. Her quick thinking saved her brother from drowning when no one was watching. It also saved her from the danger of rape when left to navigate growing up without guidance. Annette learned to trust no one, not her mother, not her father, nor men. Parents and family failed to protect her, so hypervigilance to potential danger became her protective shield and it served her well. And, it has brought her success as a CEO! She is attuned to potential threats, even those not grounded in cast-iron certainty. Survival tools are now interfering with her ability to live in her own skin. Regrettably, Annette is now suffering physically, too. She is nervous, jittery, constantly tense, hyper alert . . . even with pain in the gut and her blood pressure skyrocketing, she can’t sit with not knowing everything about everybody. The body keeps the score!

There are pros and cons to experiencing temporary feelings of fear and worry. Feeling anxious is a normal response to stressful or tense situations. On the positive side, it can help motivate us to anticipate challenges, plan ahead and even push through tough times. However, when feelings of anxiety are excessive or constant and disrupt daily life, it can become a real problem, even a mental health disorder.

Biological response to stress and anxiety: Is it temporary or is uncontrollable worry creating a stress-related disorder? When the brain perceives a threat, it activates your sympathetic nervous system which leads to physical changes in your body that propel you to take action. Your heart beats faster in times of danger. During periods of anxiety, regardless of the reason, your body goes into a similar state. As long as the stress reaction is temporary, it is completely normal but if you stay in an environment where there is constant stress, the time comes when your body organs start talking back. The stomach starts pouring out gastric juice, the colon may go into spasms and the whole gastrointestinal system is in jeopardy. Your body-mind is talking to you and the question is: Are you listening to it?

Anxiety: Where does it come from and What do we do with the signs of anxiety.

- Sweating
- Muscle tension
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Weakness or fatigue
- Nausea or upset stomach

Coping toolbox-strategies to tame the hidden dragons that cause anxiety.

Of course, family of origin issues play a part in your ability to cope with stress and anxiety. Are you stepping back into early scenes that come as a flash-back. Perhaps a parent’s anxiety became your suit of clothes. Think back to early anxiety reactions and try to discern then from now. What made that early situation so anxiety provoking that the brain’s receptors are still willing to cooperate with the mind’s instruction? Is your present mindset full or full of fears and worry? Are early family-of-origin restrictions and beliefs unconsciously holding you back from being in your best emotional and physical health? Identifying the source of your self-defeating inner talk gets you to the starting gate: “I need to be perfect,” “I’m not good enough,” or “If I’m not helping others, I’m not a good person.” Just as a boulder blocks the river’s flow towards its destination, negative thoughts can block your intentions, and can block your blood from flowing freely and impede your physical health. That blocked energy, what you cannot see or deal with, may have become the source your anxiety. Yes, it’s easier to feel for another’s pain than address

that same vulnerability in the self. Unbeknown to most of us, your strength and empowerment lies buried in that wound.

- **Discern the past from the present**
- **Create a distraction**
- Regular fitness and exercise routine can help prevent stress to release endorphins and promote feelings of wellbeing.
- Meditation to help focus on the NOW.
- **Managing Alcohol and Tobacco Use** — **cause mood altering** effect on your brain and on your cardiovascular system, increasing your heart rate and blood pressure, which may contribute to physical symptoms such as palpitations.
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to restructure the thoughts and thought patterns that occur in response to anxiety.
- **Medication** — In some cases, anxiety may be treated with Antidepressant medication or Benzodiazepines for short-term management of anxiety or as an adjunct to therapy, to reduce activity in your nervous system while promoting feelings of calmness.

Now, with recognition of your anxiety, awareness and motivation to change unconscious learned memory of negative coping strategies, your biology and your life becomes a new set of possibilities, and you become a container of potential just waiting to happen.

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