Understanding and Recovering from Anxiety Disorders

Many of us struggle to balance increasing workloads with added family pressures, and of all that life throws at us. For an estimated 25 per cent of Canadians, this stress overload can lead to an anxiety disorder.

If stress is beginning to feel really out of hand, it is time to assess whether you may be suffering from an anxiety disorder. Given that this is one of the easiest mental conditions to treat, diagnosis is the first step towards recovery. There’s no better time to get the stress in your life under control.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

Stress isn't an illness. It is merely mental or emotional tension and has a positive role to play in the release of adrenaline, which can help us face life's deadlines and challenges. However, if your reaction to stress becomes exaggerated or irrational, it is time to ask your doctor about anxiety disorders. Here are some tips to help you get started:

Symptoms of anxiety can include:

- Chronic worrying, nervousness and heightened fears
- Shaking, twitching or trembling
- Hot flushes, sweating
- Dizziness, light-headedness
- Numbness or tingling
- Breathlessness or a choking sensation
- Racing heart, tight chest
- Feelings of impending doom
- Depression and insomnia
- Sudden panic attacks which may involve trembling, shaking, racing heart, tight chest, breathlessness, a choking sensation and feelings of being out of control
- Fear of panic attacks
- Phobias, involving an irrational fear of certain objects or situations
- Extreme fear of being humiliated or "shown up" in front of others, resulting in difficulty speaking, writing or interacting in public
- Continual and compulsive unwanted thoughts or ritual actions that cannot be controlled
- Anxiety that is impacting on your life

Some of the above symptoms may indicate other, more serious conditions. If you’re concerned about symptoms you are experiencing, please check with your doctor.

Treatment

A number of therapies and medications for anxiety exist. Many of them are very successful in helping

anxiety sufferers cope with, and overcome, their condition. Before starting on a course of therapy for anxiety, a thorough physical examination to rule out any physical medical conditions should be conducted.

Some common treatments include:

- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.** This approach involves gaining understanding of thinking patterns, gradual exposure to and mastery of situations that have provoked anxiety, and various strategies-including breathing and relaxation techniques-to reduce unwanted reactions.

- **Medications.** Specific drugs such as benzodiazepines, beta blockers, tricyclic antidepressants and selective Serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) have helped many people with anxiety.

- **A combination of medication and therapy.**This is generally considered the most effective route to recovery. An estimated 80 per cent of people suffering from anxiety recover within one year of beginning such treatment. While we all deal with a lot of stress these days, no one needs to live with prolonged, debilitating anxiety.

Though not everyone is cured of their anxiety issues, treatment does offer relief for the vast majority of sufferers committed to healing. With the prospects for recovery from anxiety so strong, why not consider getting help and taking the next step towards a life more free of stress and anxiety?