

# Anxiety Disorders: What are they?

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2 credit hour course

What is anxiety? Anxiety is a fear, apprehension, the sense of danger just around the corner. Signs of anxiety in a person are usually vague physical symptoms, such as restlessness, rapid heart rate and tension. Anxiety disorders are a group of recognized mental illnesses that involve anxiety reactions when confronted with stress. These will include:

- Generalized anxiety/agitation
- Panic Disorder (person has panic attacks)
- OCD (Obsessive-compulsive disorder)
- PTSD (Posttraumatic stress disorder)
- Phobias, which include various fears

## Agitation

Agitation is very common among elderly and their families. It can also affect the caregiving staff. It has become one of the biggest management problems for in home care, as well as hospitals and long-term care facilities. Agitation is marked by inappropriate verbal, vocal or motor activity for no reason or need. Signs of agitation will include:

- Wandering aimlessly
- Cursing
- Screaming
- Pacing
- Repeating same question
- Biting
- Spitting
- Fighting and arguing constantly

There are many factors that contribute to agitation:

- Feelings that one's space has been invaded
- Boredom
- Depression
- Too much sensory stimulation
- Restraints
- Loneliness
- Frustration at loss of control

Knowing what signs to look for can greatly help in defusing a situation. Early intervention is the key to preventing serious problems later on.

### Panic Disorder

Panic disorders can best be described as panic attacks. When a person has a panic attack it is due to a case of overwhelming fear. A person will feel like they are in danger, with no reason for feeling so. The fear may become so overwhelming that the person may not be able to function. Panic attacks tend to recur, a person worrying about when the next attack may come.

### Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Patients with OCD have recurrent obsessions, thoughts, ideas, impulses, or compulsions. These will lead to a ritualistic behavior, a person doing the same thing repeatedly, having no control over it. The patient will find no joy in the activity; they just do it, not knowing why. *Obsessions* are frequent ideas, impulses, or thoughts that have nothing to do with their current situation, they simply make no sense. The person is unable to suppress or eliminate their thoughts or actions, having an overwhelming sense of urgency to act on their thoughts. Resisting these thoughts lead to stress. A patient with a *compulsion* has a purposeful, repetitive behavior that is carried out several times per day that can cause stress, interfere with daily routines, occupation, social life, or relationships. Examples of ritualistic behavior caused by OCD include washing hands repeatedly for no reason, hoarding items, cleaning over and over, counting items, having many superstitions.

### Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD develops in a person after experiencing a psychologically traumatic event. Usually a person will relive the event in their mind, have nightmares or flashbacks. They may have difficulty with normal emotional responses; feel detached from others, anxious, problems sleeping, memory, and concentrating. A person with PTSD will go out of their way to avoid situations that remind them of their traumatic event, despite the fact they may not remember all that happened. Symptoms may take months or even years after the event to develop.

### Phobias

Phobias can be defined as unfounded, recurring fears that cause a person to feel panic. A person with a phobia will usually fear an object, insect, activity, or situation. Phobias are easily described as an unreasonable fear. People with a specific phobia react differently to them, with things such as fear, hatred, disapproval, or hostility. Fears may include insects, pests, or may be external fears such as being afraid to leave home, or ride on an airplane. Reactions to phobias range from feeling dread to sheer terror, panicking and crying. Phobias can be a slight annoyance or become severely disabling to a person.

### Your Role as a Caregiver

When managing a patient who is anxious or agitated can be a daunting task. There are many things to remember that can greatly assist a caregiver. Here are some of the guidelines to follow:

- Do not argue with or confront the person. This will only serve to worsen the situation.
- Make sure the environment is safe for the patient, securing windows and locking doors.
- Check to see that the patient is wearing an identification bracelet and is fastened securely.
- Have a recent photo of the patient in the event they wander off.
- Notify the nurse immediately if the patient wanders off premises.
- Assign the patient brief tasks.
- Engage the patient in activities such as games, exercise, and other activities that will enhance their self-esteem.
- Watch for and treat injuries.
- Talk with the patient frequently.
- Short term activities are good for the patient, their attention span is short. Reward them for short term activity.
- Make sure the patient does not become exhausted.
- Monitor activities to ensure patient is not injured.

Patients may also experience panic attacks. It is very important to remember the following when dealing with the patient during an attack:

- Recognize that the patient is having a panic attack. Symptoms can be similar to a heart attack, find out what caused the attack. Is it a panic attack or medical emergency?
- If possible, remove the cause of the attack, or move the patient away from it to a quiet place.
- Ask the patient if there is anything you can do for them.
- Talk to them calmly, reassure them.
- The patient may have a desire to escape. Ask them to remain still, never grab, hold or gently restrain them. If they want to move suggest a brisk walk, stomach crunches, etc.
- Don't ever dismiss their fears. Listen to them, tell them it is ok.
- Don't pressure them. Now is not the time to come up with answers for the attack. Be a calming influence.
- Encourage them to try and control their breathing. Focusing on breathing will take their mind off the attack.
- Most people suffering from a panic attack get hot in the head and neck. Keep them cool.
- Don't leave them alone.
- Reassure the patient you will get help if the attack persists. Seek out advice from the nurse if possible.

# Test Questions

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1. Anxiety can be defined as all the following except:
  - A. Fear
  - B. Happiness
  - C. Apprehension
  - D. Sense of danger around the corner
  
2. Signs of anxiety in a person are usually vague \_\_\_\_\_, such as restlessness, rapid heart rate, and tension.
  - A. Idiosyncrasies
  - B. Disorders
  - C. Physical symptoms
  - D. Issues
  
3. These are all types of anxiety disorders except:
  - A. OCD
  - B. PTSD
  - C. TNT
  - D. Phobias
  
4. Agitation is very common among the elderly. T F
5. These are all signs of agitation in a patient except:
  - A. Laughing
  - B. Pacing
  - C. Screaming
  - D. Spiting
  
6. Boredom is a possible factor in agitation. T F
  
7. Early \_\_\_\_\_ is the key to preventing long term problems involving agitation.
  - A. Medication
  - B. Intervention
  - C. Documenting
  - D. Acceptance

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8. Panic attacks can best be described as a case of overwhelming \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Fear
  - B. Happiness
  - C. Sadness
  - D. Apathy
9. What does OCD stand for?
- A. Obsessive-Compulsion Denominator
  - B. Obsessive –Compulsive Disorder
  - C. Obsolete-Computer Desktop
  - D. Obscene-Cranberry Disorder
10. Obsession is defined as
- A. Thoughts that have nothing to do with the current situation.
  - B. Shutting down
  - C. Frequent ideas
  - D. Impulses
11. Name an example of ritualistic behavior.
- A. Counting items over and over
  - B. Hoarding
  - C. Washing hands continuously for no reason
  - D. Buying the same beverage at the store on a regular basis
12. Describe what a patient with a compulsion might do.
- A. Count a jar of pennies they have several times a day every day.
  - B. Take a nap
  - C. Wash the same shirt over and over without wearing it.
  - D. Scrub the kitchen floor several times a day every day.
13. PTSD stands for Postdramatic Stress Disorder. T F
14. Symptoms of PTSD take months, perhaps years to develop after the event. T F

15. Define phobia.
- A. Allergic reaction
  - B. Extreme hatred
  - C. Unfounded, recurring fear
  - D. Capital of Greece
16. Phobias are easily described as a \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Uncontrollable anger
  - B. Unreasonable fear
  - C. Allergies
  - D. Brain clots
17. Guidelines to follow when dealing with someone who is agitated include the following except:
- A. Monitor activities to make sure patient is not injured.
  - B. Assign patient brief tasks.
  - C. Slap them on the cheek if they become too animated.
  - D. Talk with the patient frequently.
18. Injuries are not a factor to consider when dealing with an agitated patient. T F
19. Things to do when someone is having a panic attack include the following except:
- A. Ask the patient if there is anything you can do for them.
  - B. Reassure patient you will get help if the attack persists.
  - C. Don't pressure them
  - D. Use alcohol to calm them down.
20. Symptoms of a panic attack can be similar to a \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. Ulcer
  - B. Stroke
  - C. Heart attack
  - D. Appendicitis

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