

ANXIETY

Bushfires, smoke, dust and thunderstorms, floods and coronavirus – this summer we've had the lot! Is it any wonder that many people are on edge – but is that bad for us?

What is the difference between Anxiety, Worry and Depression?

- Anxiety is a feeling of unease or nervousness about something with an uncertain outcome. Anxiety has three aspects. The first is emotional – feeling afraid or overwhelmed. The second is physiological changes: increased heart rate and blood pressure, digestive issues, insomnia. These are caused the release of adrenalin. The third aspect of anxiety is cognitive – negative thoughts such as telling yourself you can't cope. These negative thoughts are also known as worry.
- Depression is difference to anxiety and worry as it refers to feelings of despondency or dejection. Anxiety that goes on for an extended period may lead to depression.

Is Anxiety bad for our Health?

- Short periods of anxiety are totally normal and we experience them all the time such as when we're running late and we get caught in traffic. This anxiety passes quickly.
- This summer we've had one stressful situation after another which can lead to extended periods of anxiety. This has the potential to be bad for health because the adrenalin level doesn't drop.
- Chronic anxiety can also cause behavioural changes as we try to avoid the things causing the anxiety. For example, we may not take holidays or socialise because we're afraid to go out.

Will the Anxiety go When the Situation Changes?

- Often a change in the situation helps to relieve anxiety. For example, the recent heavy rains will help to relieve a lot of people's anxiety about bushfires.
- But often when you have these calamities one after another, you end up in a situation where the anxiety just continues or even grows. A good example is the bushfire survivors who are now facing enormous challenges rebuilding homes and livelihoods. In these cases, it is necessary to take steps to manage our anxiety so it doesn't overwhelm our lives.

What can We do to Manage Anxiety?

- Avoid watching and reading too much disaster news – ongoing accounts of disasters, how people are struggling, predictions for bleak outlook only aggravate our anxiety.
- Look for good news stories – things that make you smile or just generally make you feel happy.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle – eat a balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, don't drink too much caffeine or alcohol or take illicit drugs and get plenty of sleep.
- Exercise is important – movement, even just a short walk each day, helps to burn off some of that adrenalin. If you feel you don't have much energy, try some yoga or tai chi.
- Relaxation helps to calm your mind, release muscle tension and regulate your breathing. Consider mediation, stretch classes or one of the many relaxation CDs, DVDs, podcasts or apps available. Relaxation can also include sitting quietly listening to music, reading or taking a bath.
- Connect with other people – meeting friends and family reminds us that we aren't in this alone. Do enjoyable things or talk about happy times. Share a hug and a laugh – it's very therapeutic!
- Do something you find pleasurable – every day! This can distract us from our worries and remind us life can be fun too! Keep a diary of what you enjoyed each day so you can look back on it.
- Acupuncture and massage are also great for anxiety.

What if this Doesn't help?

- If anxiety is interfering in your daily life despite trying these things see a doctor – you may need a referral to a counsellor or medication to help manage your anxiety.

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