7 Physical Symptoms of Anxiety and How They Can Affect Your Health

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Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

When people think of anxiety, they often think of worried thoughts that spin around their mind at light speed. Others think the self-doubt or the fear that, no matter the situation, the worst will certainly happen. Another group will think about the daily stresses that compile in their mind to culminate in anxiety. These are all cognitive or thought-based symptoms. If you know anxiety, you know this is only the beginning of its symptoms, and physical symptoms of anxiety can arise too.

7 Main Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

Physical symptoms of anxiety take many shapes and sizes as they change in frequency and intensity. Consider these symptoms that are commonly reported:

1. Feeling numb, tingly or hot.
2. Feeling dizzy, faint or lightheaded.
3. Being shaky, unsteady or having trembling hands.
4. Shallow breathing and breathing quickly.
5. Having hot or cold sweats, sweaty hands or underarms.
6. Feeling flushed in your face.
7. Heart pounding or quickened heart rate.

Anxiety and Health Conditions

Prior to doing any serious work on anxiety reduction, it is important to make certain the symptoms are coming from anxiety. Issues with breathing, heart rate, shakiness and feeling lightheaded are linked to a number of physical health concerns. These concerns must be explored and tested before any anxiety treatment begins. Consider the following:

Heart Problems

People with anxiety present to emergency rooms every day complaining of heart related issues. They believe they are having a heart attack or that there is another malfunction with their heart. In many cases, an anxiety attack is the diagnosis, and the staff refers the patient to follow up with mental health care. Although it is less common, the opposite of this scenario is also true. Someone with a heart issue could mistake their symptoms for anxiety. In this case, the ER staff will complete testing that may include an EKG to study heart activity.

People with atrial fibrillation often complain of anxiety symptoms that actually stem from physical health concerns. The physical issues with the heart must be considered so that treatment is targeting the cause of the symptoms rather than the symptoms themselves. Your primary care physician is a clear first-line contact if you are concerned that your symptoms arise from physical problems.

Stimulant Consumption

What you put into your body has so much to do with how your body performs, operates and feels. Stimulants like sugar, caffeine, tobacco and other drugs are known to quicken your heart rate, raise your blood pressure and change your breathing patterns. If you only look at the symptoms, you or others may be led to believe that these are symptoms of anxiety.

Look deeper to gain increased awareness of the link between food, drink and drugs and your anxiety. If you drank a pot of coffee for breakfast, a 64-ounce cola fountain drink for lunch and another pot of coffee for dinner, your body is going to respond in dramatic ways. Similarly, if you take stimulant medication for another condition like ADHD, you may feel more jittery and sweaty during the day. Be sure to speak with your prescriber about the interaction between your medication and your anxiety symptoms.

Low Blood Sugar

Speaking of the interaction between food and anxiety, not eating the right foods can create the issue of low blood sugar. New understandings linking low blood sugar to anxious feelings are being explored. Low blood sugar is triggered by going extended times between meals. The problem is exaggerated when you eat sugary or carbohydrate-rich foods, as these tend to provide fast-acting energy. Once the blood sugar peaks, it will begin to drop rapidly. This is sometimes referred to as crashing.

The high blood sugar feeling followed by the crash can cause symptoms of feeling uneasy, problems with thinking clearly, feeling shaky and unsteady. To remedy this, try eating more times throughout the day. Make foods that are high in protein and fiber, as these foods will help to regulate blood sugar throughout the day.

Try the Squeeze and Release technique

If you have explored the above avenues without success, it is time to consider fighting fire with fire. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a relaxation technique that targets the physical symptoms of anxiety as well as any other relaxation. It can done almost anywhere at almost any time. All you need is a few minutes and a little bit of space to work with, and you will be on your way to feeling relaxed. Here’s how:

- **Be careful.** This first tip is an important one. Consult with your doctor to be sure that PMR is right for you. If you ever feel pain that becomes too intense while trying the relaxation, revise and modify the exercise. PMR is a gentle experience that reduces discomfort. Pay close attention to your neck and back during PMR to avoid overexertion and overextension.
- **Set the mood.** Finding the right spot to relax may take some experimentation. Try the bedroom, living room or even bathroom as you search for initial relaxation. Music, candles or scents can set the scene further. When you relax is also important to find the time of day that makes sense for you based on your symptoms. If you are new to PMR, picking the most stressful time of the day is not advisable. Once you become proficient, it will be simple to slide into your PMR in varied settings.
- **Scan your body.** Once you are in your relaxation location, take a few moments to listen to your body. Start with your toes and move up towards your head. Which areas are feeling tender or stiff? Which areas feel loose and relax? Sometimes, with anxiety, you may feel that your whole body hurts but if you take the time to scan, you can identify the spots that are more tense than others.
- **Apply tension.** PMR begins by tensing an area for 5 to 10 seconds. Your hands are tensed by making a fist and holding it tight. Alternatively, you can achieve another type of tension by opening your hands fully and spreading your fingers as wide as you can. Many areas in your body have multiple ways of tensing. Bending your elbows, straightening your legs, lifting your eye brows and scrunching your face are easy places to start. Trial and error will help you find your best options.
- **Release.** After your period of tensing the area, release the hold. Allow your hands to slowly and naturally open to a neutral position. Feel the relaxation flood in as the tension fades away. This might be the first time in months or years that your hands have experienced relaxation.
- **Repeat.** Complete the cycle of tensing and releasing two or three times to achieve full relaxation and then begin move to other areas of your body that are high in tension. When you repeat, mix your patterns to

find a system that works well for you.

In Conclusion

Managing your anxious symptoms is never a fun process. Progressive muscle relaxation provides you with the ability to take aim at what bothers you with such precision. Many people report that once their physical symptoms are reduced, the mental symptoms quickly follow. Are you ready to aim and fire at anxiety?