How a Medical Professional Helped Her Anxiety

by MARLENE WALLACE

Healing From Within

Even though I was a medical professional, I experienced panic attacks throughout my life on several occasions. In my case, the situation that caused the majority of my anxiety symptoms and panic attacks was driving on my own. If I had an adult passenger with me, I seemed to be fine. Subconsciously I guess I thought that if something went wrong, the passenger could take over and drive instead.

If I was by myself, I could only drive to specific destinations that were very close to home. Just thinking about driving beyond my imaginary "perimeter" would fill me with dread.

I tried several negative coping strategies to avoid anxiety attacks. These included taking public transit or a taxi, asking someone else to drive instead or just staying home.

After many years, I realized that these avoidance techniques were not accomplishing anything other than seriously affecting my degree of independence, which could become a serious problem as I got older. So, I decided to seek professional help. No one should **ever** feel embarrassed to ask for help.

Previously, my family doctor treated my anxiety by prescribing an anti-anxiety medication and a tranquilizer that I could take as required. I also read some “self-help” books dealing with anxiety and used relaxation techniques including deep breathing, yoga, meditation, visualization and listening to relaxing music. While these did help my anxiety levels, my doctor and I agreed that I needed more. Thus, I was referred to a clinical psychologist to receive what is referred to as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

Different from other types of “talk” therapies, CBT focuses on both recognizing and effectively changing thought patterns associated with one’s anxiety, panic or other bothersome feelings.

CBT stresses the replacement of "negative self-talk" with "positive self-talk" as well as successfully facing/conquering specific fear(s). My psychologist designed a plan in which I gradually increased my driving “exposures”. In other words, I slowly increased the distance I drove as well as increased the level of traffic congestion and severity of weather conditions I drove in.

Every week, I completed my “exposures” as often as my schedule allowed and kept track of how I felt while driving (i.e., whether I experienced any symptoms of anxiety). I reported back to my therapist at my weekly appointment, and we discussed my progress.

After several weeks, I was driving considerably farther than ever before, plus in more congested traffic conditions and worsening weather conditions. I experienced no serious anxiety symptoms or panic attacks. The sense of accomplishment and new independence continue to be life-changing!

Resource:

What Is Anxiety?