



Dealing with Anxiety: My Story

By Micha Wilhoite

Anxiety is dangerously misunderstood. When the average person hears “anxiety attack,” they meet it with confusion and disbelief. I was a skeptic myself; that is, until I experienced anxiety attacks first-hand.

It was early fall, and I had recently been in my first car accident. I was at work, when suddenly my heart started pounding hard in my chest. I found it difficult to catch my breath as my heart continued to race like I was running a marathon. I could feel my blood pumping hard and my head felt like it was going to burst. My palms became sweaty. I asked my boss if I could leave early

and get my chest looked at by the doctor, as I assumed something was wrong with my lungs or heart.

The doctor sat me down on the table, listening to my chest. Following routine check-up steps, he began asking me questions about my symptoms and my recent car accident. As he continued, I broke down in tears. At the end of the checkup he told me that along with post-concussion disorder, the shortness of breath and heart racing I was experiencing was actually anxiety or panic attacks.

“How can that be?” I asked. “I am not thinking of anything when my heart starts to race. My heart races first and *then* I start panicking.” The doctor told me that many anxiety attacks can seem like they begin with the physical symptoms. We may not be consciously thinking about an anxiety-producing subject, but our subconscious is and our body reacts first. He prescribed a natural anxiety supplement and told me to rest and try not to do anything that made me feel anxious, because the anxiety attacks would prevent my body from healing its other injuries.

The weeks following that doctor visit were difficult. I would oftentimes have severe anxiety attacks in the middle of the night, waking my husband from his sleep. It was hard enough for me to understand, let alone get my husband to understand that the anxiety attacks were not purely in my head, but were also very much a physical thing.

I learned more about anxiety and anxiety attacks when I visited my chiropractor later on that week. Physically and mentally, I felt like I had been hit by a truck. I told him about my doctor’s diagnosis and he asked me if I experienced anxiety growing up. I was aware that anxiety ran in my family but I never thought I was suffering from anxiety (even though I am a worrier). Then he asked me if I got stomachaches a lot growing up and missed school. BINGO. I constantly complained of stomach-aches all through my childhood and stayed home from school quite often. I learned that that was a sign of anxiety. He recommended a natural anxiety supplement called Kavince, which I took a sample home to try and benefited from immensely.

So what is my point in telling you all this? Well, I believe anxiety is highly misunderstood, and if left untreated for a prolonged period of time, can be extremely dangerous. According to WebMD, “If excessive worrying and high anxiety go untreated, they can lead to depression and even suicidal thoughts.” If that doesn’t seem serious enough to take action, consider this: “The chronic anxiety and outpouring of stress hormones can have serious physical consequences, including: suppression of the immune system, digestive disorders, muscle tension, short-term memory loss, premature coronary artery disease, heart attack,” and more.

My personality type as a people pleaser predestined me to be a worrier, which can lead to anxiety issues—especially when something traumatic happens. Fortunately, there are healthy and effective ways to deal with anxiety.

Regular Exercise. Many know that famous line from *Legally Blonde*: “Exercise releases endorphins, endorphins make you

happy, and happy people just don’t kill their husbands. They just don’t!” As extreme as that example is, it holds a lot of truth. Exercise does release endorphins, which helps the brain release pleasant signals. It also helps the body use up those stress hormones released in your body that the flight or fight response causes. Exercise also gets your mind off the problem that is causing the anxiety and onto whatever physical activity you are participating in.

Talking. Worrying is a common cause of anxiety. WebMD explains, “People with high anxiety have difficulty shaking their worries. When that happens, they may experience actual physical symptoms.” Therefore, it is important for a person with anxiety to have someone they can express their worries to. Whether this person is a therapist or a wise friend or family member—it doesn’t matter, as long as the person can be objective and listen to the concerns without judgment. Therapists are trained to listen objectively and offer suggestions to help an anxious person think of their worries from a different perspective. I personally believe talking to a therapist is highly beneficial for people with chronic anxiety.

Changing Your Mindset. Talking does no good if a person does not put the words into action. Many of us believe that our feelings have a mind of their own and that we have no control over how we feel or view things—but we do. Think mind over matter. Like me, many people with anxiety tend to be compulsive worriers. Getting our worries out in the open helps, but a person must be able to change his/her mindset and stop worrying over the situation in order to prevent an anxiety attack. It can be very difficult to change a way of thinking, but believe me, it is possible. Changing one’s mindset is probably the most important step when dealing with anxiety because negative thoughts deplete the serotonin in our brain. When serotonin gets depleted too much, it can actually change the chemistry in the brain and make it very difficult for the brain to think positive thoughts. Think of the example from WebMD about how excessive anxiety can lead to suicidal thoughts.

Prayer/Meditation. As a woman of faith, I rely on prayer; but for others, meditation does the trick. Being able to quiet the mind and focus on something outside ourselves can calm the storms raging inside. It can help us meet our worries with a renewed perspective, and give us the power to change our mindset.

~*Micha Wilhoite*

Resources

1. WebMD
2. <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>

