



ANXIETY WITH A SHOT OF ALCOHOL ABUSE

IN THIS CHAPTER

- *Recognize the destructive interaction between addiction and anxiety*
- *Identify common anxiety symptoms*
- *Discover twelve ways to decrease and manage anxiety*

DUAL DIAGNOSIS IS COMMON

The Journal of the American Medical Association reported 37 percent of alcohol abusers and 53 percent of drug abusers suffer from at least one serious mental illness. Of all people diagnosed as mentally ill, 29 percent abuse drugs or alcohol (NAMI, 2008).

WHAT'S YOUR WORRY?

Worry is the habit of mentally reviewing future concerns, leading to stress and anxiety. Do you worry about any of these?

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Job-related stress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship concerns | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental illness | <input type="checkbox"/> Deadlines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safety of family members | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Relapse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What others might think of you | <input type="checkbox"/> Addiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial pressures | <input type="checkbox"/> Treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weather | <input type="checkbox"/> Poverty | <input type="checkbox"/> Ex-spouse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in living situation | <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Child custody |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexuality | <input type="checkbox"/> Visitation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aging parents or grandparent | <input type="checkbox"/> Past trauma | <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legal matters | <input type="checkbox"/> Major losses | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic disease | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendships |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Education stress | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

*In one study, 13% of the people who consumed alcohol or drugs in the previous year said they had done so **TO REDUCE ANXIETY** (Crum et al, 2012).*

NOTES

SOCIAL ANXIETY

Anxiety is common in substance use disorders. Fear about social situations, work, relationships, life circumstances, and other aspects of everyday life may encourage reaching for a glass of wine or beer to calm the distress. Using alcohol to self-medicate anxiety, even mild to moderate symptoms, can result in a full-blown anxiety disorder.

ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

Although there are several distinct types of anxiety disorders, some indicators and signs overlap. Mark any anxiety symptoms you have experienced.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling tense | <input type="checkbox"/> Upset stomach | <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of impending doom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restless | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent urination or diarrhea | <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches | <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension | <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble focusing and concentrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble relaxing | <input type="checkbox"/> Rapid heart rate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disturbance | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling stressed | <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agitation | <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive worry | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance patterns | <input type="checkbox"/> Trembling | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doubt or indecision | <input type="checkbox"/> Dread | |

How have the anxiety symptoms you marked above contributed to your substance use disorder?

THE PROBLEM WITH SELF-MEDICATION

In one study, 13% of the people who consumed alcohol or drugs in the previous year said they had done so to reduce anxiety (Crum et al., 2012). When people are stressed or anxious, it is common to look for a quick fix and a speedy way to calm down. Alcohol can have a relaxing, soothing effect for those who are tense or on edge, but over time, this strategy can, and does, backfire. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs can increase the risk of an alcohol-use disorder, and other substance abuse problems, without addressing the underlying causes of the anxiety.

Have you self-medicated with drugs or alcohol in the past? If so, what effects were you hoping the alcohol or drugs would have on you? (Help you relax, provide relief from problems, etc.)

TOLERANCE CAN OCCUR

Molecular changes in the body’s central nervous system cause alcohol to have an anti-anxiety response for the user. For anxious people seeking this outcome, continued use builds tolerance to alcohol’s relaxing effects. Eventually, more alcohol is needed to reduce anxiety.

Those with naturally high anxiety levels have an increased risk of developing a severe alcohol use disorder. To make matters worse, alcohol withdrawal in chronic users is often accompanied by extreme anxiety, which magnifies and feeds the problem.

PROBLEMS DEVELOP QUICKLY

Anxiety-related alcoholism can develop in just three years, and have a devastating impact on the substance user’s health, finances, relationships, and occupation. Adding to the alcoholism, some also use pain or anti-anxiety medications to fight continuing anxiety. If the anxiety disorder is not diagnosed, what began as substance use to provide quick relief can become a deeply-established pattern that is very difficult to break.

TREATMENT HESITATION

The shame some feel about having an anxiety disorder, and the related reluctance to seek help for psychological problems, commonly contributes to self-medicating with alcohol.

CREATING YOUR ANXIETY MANAGEMENT PLAN

1 Manage your anxiety by changing the way you think.

Being optimistic and thinking positively can greatly reduce your anxiety level. Doubt and worry about the future will make you more anxious. Instead, learn to repeat positive statements to yourself such as: “I can get through this” or “I am making progress” or “this difficulty is manageable.” Review what went right, not what might go wrong in the future.

I will begin to change my thinking by:

2 Manage your anxiety by slowing down your breathing.

Anxious people are often short of breath. Their breathing is shallow and rapid. When you are calm and relaxed, practice breathing deeply. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Do this several times each day so you learn to control your breathing and are able to apply this skill when you are tense.

I can practice intentionally slowing my breathing by:

3 Manage your anxiety by relaxing your muscles.

Along with slowing your breathing, you can reduce muscle tension and tightness in your body to ease anxiety. Practice releasing the tension from

*People do not often realize a quick-fix method **ACTUALLY MAKES THINGS WORSE** in the long-term.*

**FOCUS ON THE
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various parts of your body several times a day. You may start with your head and face, paying attention to the tightness in your cheeks, jaw, forehead, and then move down to your neck and shoulders, all the way to your toes. Relax each part of your body, allowing the stiffness and tightness to be released. As you develop this skill, you will be able to relax much more quickly and easily.

My muscle-relaxing practice includes:

4 Manage your anxiety by becoming more comfortable with uncertainty.

Anxiety is fueled by doubt, insecurity, and worry about the future, and is increased as you try to control things you cannot. Allow yourself to live in the present moment. Let the future unfold naturally, without being overly concerned about what might happen. Anxiety causes you to lose the joy of the present moment. Focus on the here and now with less regard, worry, and concern about the future.

To focus on the here and now, I will:

5 Manage your anxiety by improving your problem-solving ability.

Although worrying about the future is often futile, it is helpful to pay attention to duties, tasks, and responsibilities you can control. Procrastination adds to anxiety. When you are confronted with difficulties, break the problem down into smaller parts and consider the smaller parts as challenges, rather than insurmountable obstacles. Look for progress in overcoming these problems, rather than trying to complete them perfectly. Get help, reward yourself for progress, and maintain a can-do attitude.

One large problem I can begin breaking down into smaller pieces is:

6 Manage your anxiety by eliminating some stressors in your life.

Life can be overwhelming. Financial fears, health problems, treatment responsibilities, family duties, occupational worries, and many other concerns can drive your anxiety. Although some stressors cannot be eliminated, find several that can. Are there tasks you can delegate to others? Can you ask for help from family members or friends? Look for ways to eliminate, reduce, or go without.

I will eliminate:

7 Manage your anxiety by learning to tolerate frustration better.

Situations and circumstances will not always go your way and many people react with irritation and frustration. They seem to go through their lives almost constantly upset about something. One way to reduce anxiety and stress is to lower your expectations and learn to tolerate ordinary difficulties and normal frustrations. Rather than look for ways you were inconvenienced, focus on the things that went right. When small interruptions come your way, overlook them, let them go, and move forward with strength and maturity.

My plan to tolerate frustration includes:

8 Manage your anxiety by distracting yourself.

Anxious people often have a hyper-focus on their symptoms. They pay attention to every physical pain and bodily concern. They may also worry about potentially distressing future circumstances. Although it is wise to solve problems when you can, it is also necessary to acknowledge not everything can be fixed immediately. In those cases, it is good to distract yourself with healthier thought options. Your mind wants to work on something and if you do not give it something healthy to think about, it will busy itself with tomorrow's worries. Reading, music, movies, exercise, visiting with friends, going to a meeting, and engaging in projects can all be ways to focus on the here-and-now while distracting yourself from future concerns.

I can distract myself with:

9 Manage your anxiety by exercising regularly.

Physical activity and exercise kick-start your body's natural antidepressant and act like anti-anxiety medication. Exercise is not only good for your body, but is also useful to increase self-esteem, distract yourself, and feel healthier. Spending 30 minutes exercising each day is an important part of your anxiety management and recovery program.

I can be more active by:

10 Manage your anxiety by using meditation and calming routines.

Many people are hyper-vigilant and relentlessly examine current problems, constantly scanning for future danger. Meditating on peaceful and calming images can be a useful way to reduce your blood pressure, relax your muscles, redirect your mindset, increase your immunity, and boost your mood. These techniques allow you to stay in the moment, rather than directing your attention to the worries of tomorrow. Meditation works best if you spend some time training yourself and then use it regularly.

*Exercise is not only good for your body, but it is also a useful way to **INCREASE SELF-ESTEEM**, distract yourself, and feel healthier.*

POSITIVE SELF-TALK can be a way to calm yourself and reduce your overall stress level.

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My calming and meditative routines will include:

11 Manage your anxiety by using positive self-talk.

Reviewing negative scenarios and having pessimistic thoughts can raise anxiety to extreme levels. Positive self-talk can be a way to calm yourself and reduce your overall stress level. Like many things suggested previously, this is a skill to develop and needs to be done every day. Work to recognize negative thoughts, reject them, replace with something positive, and repeat positive thoughts regularly. This simple practice will create an optimistic attitude and positive outlook.

Positive self-talk practice starts with:

12 Manage your anxiety by working with your physician.

Having physical problems and health conditions can be stressful, cause anxiety, and can make anxiety worse. While some medications are helpful, others can add to anxiety. Antidepressants and other medications can be useful to reduce anxiety symptoms, and while anti-anxiety medications do work at first, they can pose long-term addiction risks. Review your health concerns, in detail, with your physician and follow their advice. Remember, if a doctor put you on a medication, let the doctor determine if and when you should change or discontinue it.

I will talk to my doctor about:

MAKING POSITIVE STRIDES

You cannot eliminate all stress or anxiety in your life, but with a good plan, you can manage anxiety better and reduce your worries. Substance abuse issues and anxiety disorders need to be managed consistently in order to reduce symptoms and prevent relapse. There is good help available to help you change the course of your life. It is important you get the help you need.

For additional resources, see the appendix.

SOURCES

Crum, R.M., et al (2013). Reports of drinking to self-medicate anxiety symptoms: Longitudinal Assessment for subgroups of individuals with alcohol dependence. *Depression and anxiety*, 30(2), 174-183. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4154590/>

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