Social Anxiety Disorder

Almost everyone can feel some degree of discomfort in a given social situation. However, when you feel extreme fear of social encounters you have Social Anxiety Disorder. There are two types of the disorder.

- If you have the first type, you are extremely anxious in a FEW SPECIFIC situations. For instance, you become anxious when answering a question out loud in class or presenting at work.
- If you have the second type, you experience overwhelming worry in MOST OR ALL social experiences. This includes everything from going to a doctor's appointment, eating in a restaurant, or entering a crowded room.

When this disorder happens in very young children, it may be from a new baby sitter or stranger that the child is not used to. In the very young it may show up as crying, tantrums, and/or withdrawal. The very young do not understand at all what their panic is about.

Most adults with marked Social Anxiety were shy and timid as children. If left untreated these adults are seen as quiet and passive in social situations. They are highly sensitive to the criticism or disapproval of others. They may have no close friends outside of first degree relatives. They are fearful of saying or doing something foolish or becoming emotional in front of others. As a result of these fears they avoid most social encounters and select jobs and personal activities that allow them to isolate and do solitary activities.

CAUSES

A number of factors coming together at the same time can cause the disorder. For instance,

- Your genetic makeup plays a part in how sensitive prone you are or how much stress you can tolerate.
- How you were raised as a child also plays a part. Research suggests that children raised with overprotective parents, excessive expectations, overly critical parents, low assertiveness, and /or emotional insecurity increases feelings of anxiety.
- A life event that felt traumatic can also play a part. For example, if you were pointed out and shamed in public or if you were bullied time and time again by classmates on the playground.

SYMPTOMS

With this disorder, there is a fear of social situations. This anxiety is marked by:

- Apprehension.
- Nervousness.

It is a feeling of unease, worry and tension. Anxiety may also be reflected in:

- Blushing.
- Restlessness.
- Trembling.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweaty palms.
- Muscular tics and twitches.

At higher levels of anxiety there is also:

- Increased heart rate.
- A rise in blood pressure.
- Rapid breathing and muscle tensions

Eventually, when the feelings come often enough, you may try to avoid these situations. Eventually this can cause a whole range of problems that come with trying to avoid situations which make you uncomfortable.

TREATMENT

There are many treatments available for this. A few of these treatments are:

- Group therapy allows you to see you are not alone with these problems.
- Individual therapy helps you address longstanding issues with a caring professional.
- Relaxation techniques help you walk through fear with new tools.

- Hypnosis changes thinking about social settings of discomfort.
- Numerous medications are available that your caregiver can prescribe to help during a difficult time. Medications can be used for a brief period of time. This treatment reconditions you so that once off the medications, the problems disappear.

PROGNOSIS

Humans, in years past, used their uneasiness and worries about strange situations to help them survive in hostile settings. This is a normal reaction. It served them well. It only becomes a problem when the uneasiness and worry becomes extreme and begins to interfere with daily functioning. This problem is common and very treatable. Individuals who participate in treatment have a very high success rate. Prognosis is very good to excellent.

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