

How Is Anxiety Treated?

“When it got to the point where I felt like I was going to commit suicide, I knew that I needed professional help.”

Claudine Jackson has an anxiety disorder, complicated by depression and PTSD. And she’s not alone. In fact, nearly 1 in 5 men and women in the United States lives with mental illness. And anxiety disorders are the most common. With treatment and support from a social club designed specifically for people with mental illness, Claudine now has her life on track.

“So, I did seek out professional help and I stopped isolating, started coming to the Grand Avenue Club and start associating myself with people who suffer from the same condition. And that made me develop into raising my self-esteem and motivated me to get out in that community and stop hiding from my condition.”

Like many people who have generalized anxiety disorder, Claudine benefitted from Talk Therapy. One of the most effective types of Talk Therapy is known as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or CBT.

“CBT is a treatment approach that has two primary goals. The first goal is to help an individual identify ways that they're thinking and ways that they're behaving that are unhelpful to them and that are maintaining whatever problem they're experiencing. The second step of cognitive behavioral therapy is trying to find healthier more adaptive replacements.”

Molly Hass found CBT to be critical to managing her social anxiety disorder. One “tool” she learned was mental reframing, which means taking a negative emotion or stressful situation and thinking of it in a different way.

“So, then it was ok, ‘we’re going to focus on what's most likely going to happen.’ Or it might be like ‘what’s the worst that could happen? Let’s play that out. Like how will that affect you?’ to kind of show you that you’re probably going to be OK even if the worst that you think is going to happen happens.”

Learning and then practicing those CBT skills is a great tool for managing anxiety.

“It will be a relatively short period of time that we work together to help you develop mastery of these skills. But once you have reached that level you are going to know what to do in your life and apply these skills in difficult situations going forward.”

Exposure Therapy, another type of CBT can help a person safely confront an object or situation that is making them anxious or fearful. Along with Talk Therapy, medications are also commonly prescribed to treat anxiety disorders.

“The number one treatment of anxiety is an SSRI, a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor. And they help both depression and anxiety in a safe and consistent way.”

“That increase in serotonin makes us feel more comfortable, less worried, and therefore we are less anxious. It tends to take a little while to get that anti-anxiety effect. It’s not the first day that you take

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the pill it gets better, but, with time, those medications help to reduce your anxiety and help you feel better.”

Besides SSRIs, SNRIs, or Serotonin Norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, are another antidepressant used to treat anxiety. Anti-anxiety medications like Benzodiazepines might also be used, and Beta-Blockers can help with physical symptoms, such as a rapid heartbeat or trembling. Each person and each anxiety disorder is different. So, it may take some trial and error—and some time—to find what medications work best for you.

“All medications have side effects and for some people they can be minimal. And for other people, they can be so overwhelming that they cannot use, they cannot keep using the drug.”

Claudine says you need to be patient.

“Sometimes it takes maybe one or two different types of meds for them to get your combination right. But when they get it right, it's going to be an amazing life for you.”

Beyond medication and therapy, many people who suffer from an anxiety disorder find lifestyle changes help them manage.

“Certainly, any kind of method that improves one's ability to relax turns out to be crucial. Meditation sometimes does that.”

“Stress was the trigger that suggested I need to, you know, I need to up my exercise. I need to meditate more often.”

Jim Hill manages the stress of his generalized anxiety disorder, in part, with exercise.

“Your respiration is better. Your blood flow is better. All the better. But the release of endorphins that are the most wonderful natural drug your body produces that leaves you with no foginess whatsoever but makes you feel wonderful.”

Positive lifestyle changes, medication and therapy can help someone with an anxiety disorder reclaim their life. Finding good support in family, friends or, in Claudine's case, a social club for people with mental illness also makes a world of difference.

“I started doing all kinds of volunteer work and just amazing things that helped me challenge myself and the things that I was going through to let me know that I could still have personal growth and deal with my mental illness on a normal level.”