

# Understanding Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

*"It's like a weird feeling. It's not like the room is spinning. It's like I'm spinning. I have nausea."*

José Carmona has an anxiety disorder where he's petrified of crowds and open spaces. He is not alone. It's estimated that 40 million adults in the U.S. have some type of anxiety disorder. Another 16.2 million suffer at least one major bout with depression a year. One of the most common ways to treat many mental illnesses, including depression and anxiety, is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. CBT teaches a person to recognize thoughts and behaviors that may be causing anxiety or depression, then learn new ways to respond.

*"Two individuals, for example, can be very diagnostically similar, both diagnosed with depression, both diagnosed with panic disorder, social anxiety disorder. Yet the way that CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy, is applied to those patients might look different from one patient to the next."*

For Christopher Wojnar, who has both anxiety and bipolar disorder, CBT taught him to deal with the dark thoughts that sometimes come over him.

*"Cognitive Behavioral Therapy does a really good job with trying to, you know, have you change those thoughts. But ultimately there are these negative thoughts that just come out of nowhere sometimes. And it's really battling those and using positive self-talk and using tools to try to, you know, change your thoughts to be positive."*

Another CBT approach, Exposure Therapy, helps Claudine Jackson manage her anxiety. By safely exposing her to social settings, Claudine got over her fear of being around other people.

*"Going around people and getting out of the house is much better than staying in the house and isolating yourself because when you isolate yourself, your condition gets worse to me."*

*"Taking one manageable step at a time we reintroduce people, in this case, to being around other people. But again not 'hey, suck it up. You just need to be around other 'people.' It is a very strategic systematic way of going about it."*

Relaxation techniques to help calm you are still another CBT skill. It works for José and his Agoraphobia.

*"I inhale count to three, count to three and then exhale and count to three and I keep doing that over and over again. Or maybe I'll do math. And I have to think about what the next number is when I'm doing it. So, two, four, six and that keeps me occupied because it's me thinking about it and not thinking about my anxiety."*

The skills in the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy toolbox are many. A trained mental health professional can determine the best tools for your particular symptoms. Learning the skills and practicing them, can help you gain confidence to better manage your anxiety or depression.

*"If a fire started and I just sat back and waited 10 minutes it's pretty hard to put out at that point, right? And so, we kind of teach anxious patients the same thing. Don't wait 10 minutes. Don't sit back and say, 'well I'm feeling anxious but maybe it'll go away.' Maybe it will, but chances are it won't. It's going*

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*to be a bigger fire. So, we train people to apply these skills as quickly as possible. Put that fire out when it's very small."*

Talk to your mental health professional to see if Cognitive Behavioral Therapy may be right for you.