

Overcoming ANXIETY BEFORE IT HAPPENS

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Remember those exams you had in school or the big presentation you had to give for work that you thought would turn out well, but somehow you ended up with a bad grade, or you stumbled through your presentation only to feel embarrassed and humiliated? For some, the feelings of disappointment, embarrassment, and humiliation stuck with us and turned into a fear that the same thing may happen again. When the fear of getting a bad grade or feeling embarrassed again precedes an upcoming event, such as another test or presentation, we start to anticipate. It can sometimes turn into anticipatory anxiety, where we fear the worst of an event yet to come. Anticipatory anxiety can sometimes paralyze us from seeing the truth of the situation. If you have experienced anticipatory anxiety, you are not alone!

Anxiety can often motivate us, but sometimes, it can be paralyzing to the point of avoidance. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2022) describes anticipatory anxiety as the anxiety we feel when we are anticipating a big decision, action, or situation and the fear of fearing the worst. I like to describe it as the fear of not having control over a circumstance that hasn't occurred yet.

Humans are sometimes good at creating stories or judgments in our minds that don't work out in our favor. We work hard to control how we feel in order NOT to feel the anxiety or fear and end up pushing away or avoiding dealing with the temporary feeling of anxiety. We teach our brains that this is acceptable and, therefore, create a cycle of anxiety that, over time, can lead to anxiety or panic disorders.

According to the ADAA 2020¹, Anxiety Disorders are the most common mental health disorders and are highly treatable. Anxiety Disorders affect 40 million people 18 and over every year! Several methods of treatment are effective and can be treated by a mental and/or medical health professional, such as:

- Therapy (Mindfulness Training, CBT, DBT, ACT, Exposure Therapy, CPT, EMDR, etc.)
- Medication (prescribed by a medical doctor or psychiatrist)
- Complimentary or Alternative Treatment (Holistic methods, vitamins, massage, diet, acupuncture, etc.)
- Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (for individuals who do not respond to medications)

If you have suffered or are suffering from anticipatory anxiety, you are not alone. Several factors can play a role in our mental and physical well-being. Acute and prolonged stress from work, school, life, community, and the COVID-19 pandemic have increased our fear and anxiety. Remember to reach out to your support systems because, more often than not, those individuals may have struggled at some point. Take good care of yourself this year, and take a moment to listen to others who may be struggling.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

¹Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2022). Retrieved December 15, 2023 from: <https://adaa.org/>