

# Maintaining Mental Wellness ...Stop Negative Thoughts...

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# Power of thoughts

Human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

- William James

Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength.

- Anonymous

Our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, it comes from trying to control it.

- Kahlil Gibran

# Statistics

Anxiety disorders have always been the most common and pervasive MH disorders in the USA, and worldwide.

Though Anxiety is highly treatable, only about 37% of people receive treatment for it.

Nearly half the people diagnosed with Depression, are also diagnosed with Anxiety.

Rates of Depression are 3X higher since the pandemic began

By the end of 2020, BU researchers found that Anxiety had increased to 50% and Depression to 44%.

\*\*\*\*In adults ages 18-29, rates were even higher - 65 and 61% for anxiety and depression respectively\*\*\*

# Importance of identifying and treating anxious thoughts

Untreated anxiety increases the size of the fear center

It accelerates the brains ageing process

It increases the risk of other psychiatric issues

It inhibits the release of BDNF ( Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor) a protein required for the formation of new brain cells

When we think or do any action long enough, we create a new neural pathway in the brain. The more we repeat these thoughts and actions, the more we reinforce these pathways- and establish bad brain habits.

# **The brain is complicated organ:**

It is an organ that weighs 3 pounds...consistency of jell-o

It has 100 billion neurons with trillions of connections to other cells

It can process information at a speed of 268 mph.

Each of us can think approximately 60,000 thoughts per day -  
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50% in images and 50% in words.

90% of these thoughts are repetitive and not based in reality.

# Anxiety and depression can both, cause and be caused by negative thoughts

The brain makes up 2% of your body's mass but requires 20% of the energy. Hence it devotes energy towards automation and repetition to make it more efficient. Great for tasks - but terrible for emotional choices.

In an effort to continue being the efficient machine the brain needs to be, even behaviors that don't serve us well, including the contents of our thoughts and behaviors, get automated. They go out of the conscious control of the brain- they become "mindless".

**95% OF OUR COGNITION IS 'UNCONSCIOUSLY CONSCIOUS'.**

And we begin to live the consequences of these habitual patterns of thinking.

We become anxious and depressed. We feel out of "control".

# Anxiety and Depression are now thought to exist on a continuum.

**ANXIETY** is High energy state

10 alarm fire drill  
Fight or flight is triggered:

Physically dramatic symptoms  
Palpitations, chest pain,  
Shortness of breath  
Headaches, brain fog  
Dizziness, Nausea  
Avoidance of places that  
Provoke anxiety  
Feeling of dread and doom

Excessive worrying  
Ruminative thoughts  
Irritability  
insomnia  
Decreased  
concentration / focus  
Low self esteem  
Isolating behaviour  
Feelings of dread  
Out of control

**DEPRESSION** is a low energy state.

Feelings of guilt, shame  
Low energy

Low Motivation  
Weight loss / gain  
Poor coping

Worthlessness, brooding  
Hopelessness  
Suicidal thoughts

## Depressed Thoughts live in the PAST

Laced with guilt and pessimism

Brooding and dwelling on past events

Replaying events or conversations

Shame and regret

Overanalyzing

Eg: "I'm no good", "there's point in life"

## Anxious thoughts live in the FUTURE

Fear of the unknown

Worry about what could happen

Overthinking "what if" scenarios

Thinking "worst case" scenarios

"I can't cope"- "I'm going to die".

Feeling anxious for what is to come



The quality of your **thoughts** determine your **feelings and emotions** which in turn impact your **behaviors**.

The emotional part of our brain is the oldest part-hence lightning quick to respond and very dramatic when it does. The logical brain ( prefrontal cortex) wires after birth over the next 20-25 years.

Your brain reacts to every positive and negative thought you have by releasing chemicals that make you feel either happy, reassured and confident, or edgy, irritable, and anxious.

Most negative thinking is **AUTOMATIC** and **UNCONSCIOUS** and goes **UNNOTICED.....ANTs....Automatic Negative Thoughts**

Watch out for these “patterns of thinking:” or cognitive distortions

1. **ALL OR NONE** - ALWAYS OR NEVER THINKING
2. **OVERGENERALIZATION**- ONE NEGATIVE EVENT BECOMES A NEVER ENDING PATTERN OF DEFEAT
3. **MENTAL FILTERING**- FOCUSING ON ONE NEGATIVE ASPECT-DISCARDING THE REST
4. **FORTUNE TELLING**- PREDICTING THE WORST OUTCOME
5. **MIND READING** - YOU ASSUME YOU KNOW WHAT OTHERS ARE THINKING

6. **CATASTROPHIZING** - INFLATING YOUR ERRORS AND MAGNIFYING OTHERS SUCCESS

7. **GUILT BEATINGS** - "I OUGHT, SHOULD, MUST, HAVE TO". (DEPRESSION OR FRUSTRATION) ACTIVE INNER CRITIC— ERODES SELF ESTEEM

8. **BLAME**- YOU ARE POWERLESS TO CHANGE SOMETHING IF OTHERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CAUSING IT.

9. **PERSONALIZATION** OR SELF REFERENTIAL THINKING

10. **LABELING** - DEFINING OTHERS BY A SINGLE ACT" HE IS A DRUNK" OR "FAILURE"

11. **EMOTIONAL REASONING** - BELIEVING YOUR EMOTIONS AS THE TRUTH. I "feel" it so it must "be" so.

VALIDATE THE EMOTION BUT JUDGE BASED ON RATIONAL EVIDENCE

1. Most negative thinking is automatic and goes unnoticed.
2. Every feeling you have and emotion you experience is a result of your distorted negative thinking.
3. Awareness is not an easy task because this thinking pattern has become effortless, and automatic, and normalized over many years.
4. Good news: your moods are created by your thoughts and perceptions and not by actual events around you, you have a fair degree of control over changing them.

# Managing ( not Stopping) Negative Thoughts:

Treatment is not straightforward. It's not as prescriptive as for other physical illnesses. It's a journey.

It is about questioning the meaning we assign to events, and words and actions of others or self.

It is about increasing awareness about unhelpful automatic thoughts, their effect on our emotions and impact on behavior.

It is about challenging the beliefs, negative perceptions or distortions that get in the way of living a more mentally healthy life.

## #1 MANAGE YOUR ATTITUDE

The primary task is to manage your attitude, and raise your awareness about the automatic nature of your thoughts.

"Attitude" means your basic view of your relationship with panic and anxiety, your judgment of the distress you are experiencing.

Your mindset about your anxiety and the thoughts will determine the degree of distress you feel and the amount of time and energy you are willing to devote to changing it.

## Expected Attitudes

"I can't let anyone know."

"Panic is evil, bad, the enemy."

"I want to avoid the symptoms."

"I must relax right now."

"I must stay on guard."

"This is a test."

"I must be certain (that there is no risk)."

"This had better work."

## Healing Attitudes

"I am not ashamed."

"What can I learn as a student of panic?"

"I want to face the symptoms to gain skills."

"It's OK to be anxious here."

"I won't guard myself against anxiety."

"This is practice."

"I can tolerate uncertainty."

"It's OK if it doesn't work."

## #2 Change your relationship to the thoughts

### DO

Become aware of your thoughts

Do acknowledge that your mind is busy with the thoughts

Keep the idea that you will actually worry and have distressing thoughts

Change the idea that you have to instantly respond every time you become aware of your negative thoughts.

Practice mindfulness and self awareness

### DON'T

Do not engage with the thoughts

Do not attempt thought stopping or replacement- it leads to thought rebounding.

Do not criticize yourself for not stopping them



## #3 CBT (COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY)

Primary mode of therapy that helps to recognize and change unhelpful patterns of thinking that create problems.

It helps you identify and change the negative thoughts into more helpful and adaptive responses.

It helps to better understand the behavior and motivation of others.

CBT helps you drop safe behaviors like avoidance and escape and adopt realistic beliefs.

It teaches you to calm your mind and relax your body.

It teaches you to be your own therapist.

## #4 Keep a Thought Diary/ Journal

*“There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.”*  
– Ernest Hemingway

Taking the words and feeling which are drifting like mist all day in your head and putting them in concise tangible statements is very helpful

It helps identify patterns - you can identify ‘you’ specific distortions and traps.

It helps get rid of the nervous energy the thoughts create. “ Write it out to get it out”.

ACTIVELY WRITE about positive things - it is very therapeutic - write for just 2-4 mins about a beautiful picture you saw, a scene in nature, a song you heard, a conversation you were part of.... Reminds you there is beauty even in the most difficult day.

## #5 Mindfulness ..... This is a quality

Mindfulness is the simple act of paying attention and noticing and being present in whatever you're doing. The act is intentional, accepting and without judgement. When you are being actively mindful, you are noticing the world around you, as well as your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, movements, and effects you have on others around you.

Mindfulness focuses on changing the relationship b/w the person and their thoughts- rather than changing the thoughts themselves. It helps us become the observer of our thoughts ... see them as just a bunch of words going through your mind.... Don't automatically think they are true and hold on to them. Unhook from them. It can be very liberating to be able to identify and step back from unhealthy thinking.

# #6 Meditation..... is a practice

Meditation typically refers to formal, seated meditation practice. It is an intentional practice, where you use focus to increase calmness, concentration, awareness, and emotional balance. Seated meditation usually begins with deep breathing in a comfortable position, bringing all your awareness to your breath and consciously guiding the mind toward an anchor, or a single point of focus.

Breath-awareness meditation - it anchors you in the midst of an emotional storm. It holds you steady till the storm passes. Breathe in calm, breathe out stress.

Loving-kindness meditation - repeat 3 or 4 reassuring messages to yourself, then others.

Mantra-based meditation

Visualization meditation - this can be guided or unguided

Guided Imagery meditation- this is directed by audio, video, or written script.

# M & M teach us to become aware of our thoughts - without judgement

**Recognize the thoughts... and let it go...** by bringing your focus back mindfully to your present moment. Talking in a soothing manner- it calms the nervous system. It helps tap into the sea of calm compassion and awareness that lies just beneath the turbulent surface waters of emotions, thoughts, conditioned responses.

**Practice self compassion.** Start by silencing the inner critic. I am sure there are a lot of you here that feel if you are not harsh and critical towards yourself, you will not be motivated and achieve goals. WRONG. Self compassion and kindness towards yourself increases productivity, motivation, resilience, initiative; it fights addictions, stress and burnout.

Start talking to yourself in a kinder tone, nurture yourself with things you truly enjoy - nature - walking - sitting and letting the sun warm you up - having a cup of tea - read a book laying on the grass.

## # 7 ACTIVELY FOCUS YOUR MIND AWAY FROM NEGATIVE THOUGHTS:

- Is this thought useful or helpful in any way?
- Is it really true- fact and evidence proven - really true?
- How do I feel when I think this thought?
- How do I feel when I do not think the thought?
- Does this thought help me take effective action in any way?
- What new thought can I focus on instead?
- What can I be grateful for in this present moment?

## **Role of medications: Treats the underlying condition.**

**Selective Serotonin reuptake Inhibitors:** Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil, Celexa, Lexapro are some examples.

**Benzodiazepines:** Valium, Klonopin, Ativan, Xanax. These act on the physical symptoms of panic

**Buspar:** Also increases Serotonin and decreases Dopamine in the brain.

**Beta blockers:** Propranolol. Act on Norepinephrine- a hormone responsible for the acute stress response.

Talk to a Psychiatrist, therapist, counselor or coach. There are many online telehealth sites that are affordable.

# To Recap- learn sustainable moderation

Don't forget the simple things:

- Establish a healthy daily routine- get enough sleep, nutrition, exercise and rest, spend times with friends and family.
- Become intentional about what is in your control .
- Change your mindset to a growth mindset ask out loud- “ what did I learn from this experience?”
- Meditate for 1- 5 mins - everyday.
- DO NOT NORMALIZE BAD MENTAL HEALTH.
- Build self-esteem and fight feelings of worthlessness by talking back to the harsh internal critic. Change your perspective- move on.
- Learn to question your thoughts - know that they are NOT based in reality - learn to sit with difficult feelings. Ask- “What do I want to do with these feelings?”

It can take courage and persistence to change and let go of certain narratives in the mind, but our willingness to do so will result in feelings of empowerment, inner strength, and peace of mind.



# RESOURCES:

## PODCASTS:

1. Let's Talk About Mental Health- Jeremy Godwin
2. The Transforming Anxiety podcast- Kelly Hanlin McCormick
3. Ten Percent Happier - Dan Harris
4. The Happiness Lab with Dr.Laurie Santos

## BOOKS:

1. Feeling Good - David Burns, M.D.
2. Siddhartha's Brain - James Kingsland
3. Wherever You Go There You Are - Thich Nhat Hanh
4. Atomic Habits - James Clear

## MEDITATION APPS:

1. Calm
2. Headspace
3. Insight Timer
4. Stop, Breathe and Think

## WEBSITES:

1. ADAA.COM
2. ANXIETYZONE.COM
3. VERYWELLMIND.COM

