

High-functioning Anxiety

Anxiety is common.

Anxiety is that feeling of fear or worry that one encounters when faced with stressful or troublesome situations. It is the body's natural response to such situations.

However, when the anxiety becomes persistent as to interfere with one's work, home life or interpersonal relationships, it would be diagnosed as an anxiety disorder.

There is one anxiety disorder that is not an officially-recognised clinical diagnosis. You guessed it – High-Functioning Anxiety.

For one, it is not easy to diagnose, since the definition of functioning varies from person to person, and is subjective.

Secondly, a disorder is meant to be an impairment to one's ability to properly function, something which is bypassed by High-functioning anxious people as they are... well.. 'functioning', managing to get by in their day to day activities and responsibilities.

But the condition is real, and it should be taken seriously. Treatment is also available, and can help achieve a balanced life.

Persons living with High-functioning anxiety can often drive themselves into ruin in sense of health, well-being and relationships.

These persons are over-achievers, and yet they still feel that they are not doing enough. Out of anxiety, they would show up much earlier at their appointments than one normally does. They are always fearful of letting others down.

On the Surface

Things are often not how they appear to be. That speaks volumes for those with High-functioning Anxiety.

For those on the outside, they appear to be high-achievers, always punctual, ever ready to help others, flawlessly adorned and perfect in appearance, always up to the task, never missing the deadlines.

These may also be thought to be some of the positive aspects :-

1. **High Achievers**
2. **Ever punctual**
3. **Always ready to help others (Never say no)**
4. **Perfectly dressed**
5. **Never miss the deadlines**
6. **Active**
7. **Faithful and loyal in their relationships**
8. **Calm & collected; Considering even the remote possibilities & preparing ahead of time**

At least that's how things appear on the surface.

Behind the Glass Wall

Often hidden behind that success is the toppling pile of nervousness, worries and struggle, which may never become visible to others. Others might just notice and think of those symptoms as a part of your personality, unbeknownst to them that those characteristics are a result of your high-functioning anxiety.

1. **Overthinking – You tend to lay out all the possibilities, often thinking in extremes, and just making yourself worry.**
2. **Constant need for reassurance – ‘Do my friends still like me?’, ‘Am I still doing enough?’ – having these questions keep popping in your head, pushing you to the brink where you need reassurance to maintain stability is another negative aspect of High-functioning anxiety.**
3. **Never able to enjoy things in the present – Always on the lookout for any possible negative event, you tend to miss out at being “in the moment.”**
4. **Betraying expectations - Always feeling as though you are not doing enough; feeling guilty of being unable to stand up to other's expectations.**
5. **Unable to say ‘No’; People Pleaser – Not being able to deny requests even though you may be overburdening yourself (out of guilt).**
6. **Procrastinating some days, following which you tend to take on extra heavy work, then repeating the same cycle**
7. **Too Loyal – Being ‘loyal to a fault’ means ignoring your partner's shortcomings, and it can be harmful**
8. **Mental and Physical Exhaustion**
9. **Perfectionism – You like things a certain way, and no other way is acceptable to you.**

Having high-functioning anxiety can be very exhausting. People suffering from it often develop false personas to present the world, and instead of pursuing activities that they would enjoy or like to do, they have to pursue those activities which would calm their anxiety. Such people often don't deal properly with their feelings, and end up bottling them up inside.

When you are not able to materialise your emotions and keep them bottled up, you also aren't able to fully invest in relationships, and thus have trouble maintaining those relations.

Ask for Help

It's never easy asking help for mental health problems. For one, there is the often perceived stigma (sense of shame or disgrace associated with certain acts, qualities etc.) that may be binding you down, however it's important to realise that there is no shame to be felt when talking about your health problems (never had a prostate?)

When more and more people open about their issues, it becomes easier for the others to rise out of their isolation too.

There are many famous entities to have come forward with (in this case) high functioning anxiety issues – Barbra Streisand and Ricky Williams.

For a more generalised anxiety category, celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Stephen Colbert, Adele have also come out about their anxiety issues.

Apart from the stigma, there are also others things that might be blocking your path –

- You might be afraid that if you lose your driving force i.e. your anxiety, you will not be as good at your work as before
- You are afraid to lose the positive impact of your anxiety on your success
- Believing that even if you open up about your problem, there will be no one who would be able to help you
- In many cases with mental health problems, the people suffering from them don't think that what has been happening to them is even remotely abnormal. They consider it totally normal.
- You might feel that since you are successful (or achieving your goals) you don't need help

Treatment

Finally getting down to it, treatment is available.

If you feel you diagnose with the symptoms of high-functioning anxiety, or any other mental health illness for that matter, do contact a medical expert or a professional.

Even though treatments are available, often people don't avail them, missing out on how much these treatments can help cope with high-functioning anxiety.

Typical treatment for high-functioning anxiety generally revolves around psychotherapy, which involves you meeting with the psychotherapist at regular scheduled appointments.

The use of certain medications such as SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) may also be involved.

What you can do

1. Consider beginning at the beginning – your lifestyle.
Try implementing life-style changes such as reducing caffeine intake, eating healthier food and start exercising regularly.
2. How about deep breathing – You can start with 10-15 minutes a day of deep breathing. Deep breathing is what it sounds like - taking deeper and longer breaths. This has quite a few benefits (which I am not going to list here) – relaxing stress, decreasing blood pressure, circulating more oxygen.
3. Combat Negative Thoughts – Have no mercy on those opponents that torment you. Identify your negative thoughts, and reorganise head with more helpful and better ones.

4. Better Sleep Habits – Form a bed-time that suits your style and schedule, and start maintaining it. Don't keep lying in your bed if you are not falling asleep. If your mind is running amok, get up and maybe go for a walk.
5. Mantra – Yes, a mantra. Dealing with perfectionism as a symptom of your high-functioning anxiety is hard, so prop up a few mantras and when you are being pushed down by yourself, repeat that mantra in your mind.
6. Apart from deep breathing, yoga and meditations are also good options to choose from. You can also try your hand at activities like drawing, painting etc. or find hobbies to lighten your stress.

Last of all – Take Care of Yourself