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July 2011

## Anxiety

"I always thought I was just a worrier. It's like I would feel keyed up and unable to relax. At times it would come and go, and other times it would be there all day long. I'd worry about my grown children and what was going on in their lives, or how I was going to get everything done at work, and which dish I should make for a dinner party I was attending on the weekend. I just couldn't let anything go - even the little things. When my problems were at their worst, I'd miss work and feel guilty. Then, I'd worry that I might lose my job. Can treatment help me?"

People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) go through the day filled with exaggerated worry and tension, even though there is little or nothing to provoke it. They anticipate disaster and are overly concerned about health issues, money, family problems or difficulties at work. Sometimes just the thought of getting through the day produces anxiety.

Generalized anxiety disorder is diagnosed when a person worries excessively about a variety of everyday problems for at least six months. People with GAD can't seem to relieve their concerns, even though they often realize that the anxiety is more intense than the situation warrants. They can't relax, startle easily, and have difficulty concentrating. Often they have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. Physical symptoms that accompany the anxiety include fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, muscle aches, difficulty swallowing, trembling, twitching, irritability, sweating, nausea, lightheadedness, having to go to the bathroom frequently, feeling out of breath, and hot flashes.

Generalized anxiety disorder affects about 6.8 million American adults, including twice as many women as men. The disorder develops gradually and can begin at any point in the life cycle, although the years of highest risk are between childhood and middle age. There is evidence that genes play a modest role in GAD.

Other anxiety disorders, depression, or substance use often accompany GAD, which rarely occurs alone. GAD is commonly treated with medication or cognitive-behavioral therapy, but co-occurring conditions (the presence of two or more disorders at the same time) must also be treated using the appropriate therapies.

It's normal to feel anxious from time to time, especially when life is stressful. However, if you have ongoing anxiety that interferes with day-to-day activities and relationships and makes it hard to enjoy life, it's time to ask for help.

Dee Staudt, LMSW is the director of Outpatient Services for COMCARE of Sedgwick County. Dee has been working in the community as an advocate for social services and mental health for 18 years. If you would like to talk to a professional confidentially, help is available by calling 316-660-7540. COMCARE is the licensed Community Mental Health and Certified Substance Use Center in Wichita and Sedgwick County serving children, adolescents and adults.