



MANAGING ANXIETY

Ask the group if they feel that they experience anxiety as a result of their vestibular disorder.

Anxiety is defined as feelings of tension and repetitive, prolonged thoughts of worry. Anxiety can be anything from a one-time event to a full-blown disorder. Some symptoms of anxiety are:

- Shortness of breath
- Trembling
- Dizziness
- Fear of dying
- Sweating
- Choking
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Crying
- Hyperventilating

Discussion: What happens when you are feeling anxious?

Anxiety can become so disabling one may avoid certain situations altogether. The original incident could be a one extremely fearful episode or something a person has experienced over a longer period of time.

WHY DO VESTIBULAR PATIENTS EXPERIENCE ANXIETY?

Physical basis for the anxiety: In some cases, the actual vertigo itself neurologically impacts the autonomic nervous system and causes a heightened state of “fight or flight response.” This is called a [sympathetic response](#) and feels a lot like anxiety symptoms because it involves a hyper-alert nervous system. (Source: Dr. Kimberley Bell, DPT)

Fear about recurrence of symptoms may cause anxiety among vestibular patients, e.g. fear of falling, activities that provoke symptoms such as shopping, bending over, showering, traveling, etc.

Anxiety can also result from questions and insecurities about your condition and its impact of your life, for example:

- What is the cause of this?
- When is it going to hit me again?
- Will I be like this for the rest of my life?
- How much is this going to cost me?
- How can I work or drive?
- Who will pick up my kids?
- Will my spouse be supportive?
- Why can't my doctor figure out what is wrong?

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- Why isn't anything showing up on any of the tests I had?

In patients with pre-existing anxiety disorders, the vestibular symptoms can make their symptoms of anxiety much worse, sometimes escalating to anxiety-related depression.

Discussion: If you experience anxiety as a result of your vestibular disorder, what are some of your triggers?

Anxiety can affect you mentally, emotionally and physically. Here are some simple tips for managing anxiety.

COUNTER NEGATIVE SELF-TALK WITH POSITIVE SELF-TALK

For example, if you are worried about your family's reaction to you not feeling up to attending an event, tell yourself, "My family loves me for who I am, not what I do. They will accept me whether or not I go to this one event."

Discussion: Can you think of examples of positive self-talk that might help your anxiety?

IMAGERY

This technique can be effective before an anxiety attack and during a mild anxiety attack. Imagine yourself somewhere peaceful, quiet and serene, while taking slow deep breaths. (Only practice this in a safe place, not operating a car, etc.)

Discussion: Can you describe your "happy place"?

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

When the body is anxious it tenses up. If you relax the body, you may be able to reduce your anxiety. These are simple exercises where you purposely tense muscle groups then relax them. You can find more detailed instructions online or from books at a public library.

Discussion/Exercise: Try leading the group through a quick body scan, tensing then relaxing the feet, legs, torso, shoulders, arms, neck, and facial muscles. Ask them if they feel more relaxed.

It is best to address the underlying issues of anxiety early. You may want to seek the help of a mental health professional. Anxiety is often resolved easily and quickly with proper diagnoses and treatment.

OTHER WAYS TO MANAGE ANXIETY

Exercise, meditation, distracting yourself with other activities, therapeutic oils, medications, etc.

Discussion: What other methods do you use to manage your anxiety?

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