

Ep #13: Understanding Anxiety



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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Anxiety is a very painful disorder. It is very painful to constantly have your brain thinking all the time about possible catastrophes. It is exhausting for your body to have to keep up with that, to feel wired and tired and irritated for no reason and to know you're overreacting and not be able to stop it.

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Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hey, hey, everyone, welcome to the show. Today, we are talking about anxiety. I thought it was about time we did a show on anxiety. It's been a few episodes and this is actually my jam, as morbid as it sounds, I actually love talking about anxiety, I talk about it all day long.

This is my specialty area for kids and adults and for many of you, I already told you, I started off as a full-blown child therapist and then later branched into adults about halfway through my career. It kind of happened organically with my work with kids. And so, at any rate, anxiety is my jam. I love talking about it and I love educating people about it and I love empowering people with what they can do to try to feel better.

So my hope with this episode is that it's going to be an educational episode. So I'm hoping what you're going to be able to understand a little bit better about what anxiety is, how it manifests, and what you can do about it.

Alright, so, here we go. Anxiety, contrary to popular belief, anxiety is not just in your mind. So when people tell an anxious person to calm down, they're not going to. So that doesn't work and it's – I know that it's just this

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intuitive response people say when someone's worried and panicking. They're like, "Just calm down, you'll be fine."

The anxious brain, it doesn't work, and it causes a lot of tension and frustration for both people that are trying to interact with each other, okay. So here's what you need to know. Anxiety can manifest itself in multiple ways and depending on your biology, depending on your genetics, depending on your life experiences and depending on your personality, it will uniquely manifest itself for you.

So, while the DSM has a very clear list of diagnostic criteria for anxiety, it will still show up uniquely within the realm of those symptoms for each person, just depending on you. And some of the common symptoms are difficult sleeping, feeling agitated, wired and tired, always worrying, your mind races. You might even feel sweaty sometimes, you might have panic attacks. And then it branches out into some subfactors, which are oh so fun. And I say that sarcastically because anyone with anxiety knows for sure they are not fun at all.

But they break off into some other categories. So under the anxiety umbrella, we have OCD, we have panic disorder, we have social anxiety. We have separation anxiety, and then we've got some phobias. So you guys see what I mean/ Anxiety can manifest itself in multiple different ways. And then, depending on who you are, it shows up uniquely inside of you based on who you are.

Okay, so what can you do about this? So here's what I want you to know. Many times, people go to therapy and they try to do talk therapy. And talk therapy is great. It has a place and it totally is helpful for when we need to use things like CBT, DBT, and we need to gain some insight into who we are as a person, how we got this way, and what we should do about it.

What it does not do is it does not heal the effects of anxiety or trauma that might be stored in your body. And this is the most overlooked piece of the

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treatment of anxiety. Anxiety is in your body. Emotions start in the body, okay. So this is going back to previous episodes.

Emotions start in the body. They do not necessarily start in the brain. And so the brain and the body are always trying to get on the same team. However, they don't always communicate with each other that great, as anyone with a panic attack will tell you. Because your brain might look around and you're like, "I'm in a movie theatre and I'm actually completely safe right now. But yet my body feels like I need to run out of here screaming." So there can be this out-of-alignment feeling and a lot of people who have anxiety find this to be maddening. Like why is this happening? Why does my body feel like I'm going to die and my brain is telling me everything is fine?

Or it can actually work in the reverse. You can have anxiety disorders create constant worry, like your brain almost never stops. Like, the thoughts keep going. You obsess and you ruminate and on and on the loop goes. And your body is kind of fine until it catches up to what the brain's been thinking about, and then it's like, "Well shoot, should we be worried? Is something bad going to happen?"

And the brain is like, "Yeah, something terrible is going to happen." The body is like, "What's going to happen?" The brain is like, "I don't know, 20 different things, which one are you asking for exactly?"

So anyone with an anxiety disorder is going to understand that little narrative that I just did. But the goal with therapy is to get those two on the same team. We want to integrate the mind and the body so that they are on the same side because that alone decreases how much symptomology that you are going to have.

So, the other piece of anxiety, not that it just lives in your body, but there is a biological and genetic component to anxiety. So the latest and the greatest research is on genes; that genes for anxiety are passed down.

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And largely, we see this so much, more and more people without traumatic experiences are having anxiety disorders.

And so what I mean by that is they haven't necessarily had anything bad happen to them per se, and yet they are riddled with anxiety, yet they are riddled with panic attacks. So it could possibly mean that a gene has been passed down. And so some people are just – and I hear this all the time from parents, since I treat anxiety in kids and I especially treat a large portion of the kids I see have OCD.

And I can't even tell you how many parents have told me in the initial intake, the initial parent meeting, they're like, "I feel like he was just born anxious. He's always been this way."

And so it's kind of interesting when you think about the way genetics form us, it's kind of been come to know that anxiety is largely due to our genetics. So you can be predisposed to the anxiety gene and then, based on your life experiences, it can light up, just like any other gene.

So if you've done any learning about genetics, we all carry these certain genes for all kinds of things. And so some of them stay in remission and we never see them. And then others of them get ignited and they light up and then an illness starts or some kind of something starts inside of us, right?

And so what we're finding in the latest and the greatest research is that this is true for anxiety. People can carry a genetic element, they can carry the gene for anxiety, and who's to say what life experience that would be or who could say what environmental stressors that could be. There's no perfect science in some of this genetics stuff as to why a gene would light up.

But I think it helps for people to know this because it destigmatizes things. It's kind of like anxiety is not about you being strong and about you forgetting about your worries. It's an unrealistic expectation to have for

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someone who is anxious, especially if you were to find out that they have a gene for it.

Their biology is now wired to behave this way. And, my dear sweet friends, do hear this clearly; that doesn't mean it's doom and gloom. That doesn't mean the story ends there. I do not ever want you to go into a mindset of, well I have the genes so I'll just have to live with this forever.

No, that's being a martyr. You don't need to do that. You don't need to suffer. Because along with all this research that we're finding as to why anxiety starts to why it becomes the way it is, we also have so many solutions for it. We have so many proven evidence-based treatment models that actually work.

So it doesn't matter if you have the gene. What you need to know is that you feel anxious and you want to feel better and it is time to get the help and support you need to make that happen.

So the only reason I'm even bringing it up is because I want to destigmatize this whole idea that anxiety and worry is about weakness. That is bullshit. It is not weakness. Anxiety has many, many facets to it. So this is the genetic facet to it.

Then there's a biological component to it, okay, friends? And the biological component of it could mean that perhaps you have a chemical imbalance. Perhaps something in your gut is out of whack. Okay, my dear friends, there is so much research around gut health and anxiety because, truth be known, most of our neural receptors are in our guts.

That means we absorb the most serotonin, the most dopamine in our guts. And then it goes to our brain. So if you've got a ton of inflammation in your gut or you're eating a bunch of foods that you have some secret food intolerances to or allergies or that are causing your gut to be stressed out, it's also going to impact your mental health. And I can't tell you how many people I have talked to that have worked to get systemic inflammation

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down out of their bodies and heal their guts, a lot of times their mental health improves as well.

And this is true for medication. Sometimes, people that have some chemical imbalances, when they take antidepressants, they actually start to feel better. And largely because their body is either producing too much of something or too little of something, and so biologically taking medication that can also be really helpful.

So, in recap, there are many things that impact our biology that can also impact our health. I'm a huge proponent of naturopathic medicine for if you're having food intolerances or if you notice every time you eat something you actually feel sad and depressed and lethargic, you probably have some hidden intolerances and western medicine won't address it.

They'll only address it if it's an actual allergy, at least that's been my experience. And an actual allergy means you need like an EpiPen, that's like a peanut allergy where your life's at stake. But naturopathic medicine will address things like food intolerances, meaning it creates inflammation in your body every time you eat it and you don't digest it well, okay.

So these are important components to kind of keep in mind when you're thinking about anxiety, and there should be no shame in any of them. Taking medication, if that works for you, great. If it doesn't work for you then find the thing that does.

And so this is why you've heard me in other episodes talk about you need to become an educated discerning person because there's a lot of aspects to anxiety and there's a lot of treatment options available and you're going to have to figure out what is the right thing for me, because just because it was right for your friend, doesn't mean that it's right for you, or just because it worked for your husband, doesn't mean it's going to work for you. You're a unique person with your own unique set of symptoms based on your life and who you are.

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Okay, so then there's that piece of it. Now, let's talk about traumatic experiences. That is just the environmental factors. So, a large portion of anxiety disorders get birthed out of environmental or traumatic experiences, and this can happen in the relationship realm or it can happen if you're living in a high-stress area where there is a lot of scary things going on.

And so in these cases, when trauma is involved, it can be very difficult to treat anxiety, which is one or two modalities. And so when trauma is at play, you almost always need to work with a trauma informed therapist, a trauma trained therapist who knows how to address the things and the symptoms that are in your body because that is the part where you will get stuck in your treatment of anxiety.

Because in traumatic experiences, these memories freeze. And every time a symbol comes up in your life that reminds you of that thing, you're likely to light up with anxiety. And so this is going to be a different treatment path for you because it's going to be difficult to fully medicate something if the root of the issue is a memory.

So we want to heal the memories out, and this is very possible. There's several evidence-based modalities. EMDR, I think is the best, but that's because I'm an EMDR-trained clinician. But art therapy is also very good, somatic experiencing, and there's some others as well. I think parts work is very good, which is also known as internal family systems. It's also very good for kind of resolving some of this stuff when it comes to trauma. But many people report, when they really face their past experiences and they heal from them, a lot of times, the panic and the anxiety goes down.

And then the last one, which is most traditional, right, is just changing your thoughts and changing your emotional responses. And so learning how to reframe negative thinking into neutral thinking, learning how to change your emotional responses and breaking up the autopilot that anxiety loves to put you in is very important.

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So all of these things working together can really give you a lot of relief. But depending on your severity and depending on what's actually going on for you, you might just need one or two of those things. And if things are more severe for you, you know, maybe taking an approach to all of them.

But I think knowing and understanding that anxiety disorders are quite a big deeper than just normal worries, and this is why it's so hurtful for people who have anxiety disorders when others are just like, don't worry about it, or be tougher, be stronger, why are you being so annoying? It's very hurtful because someone with an anxious brain, if they could calm down, they would.

Anxiety is a very painful disorder. It is very painful to constantly have your brain thinking all the time about possible catastrophes. It is exhausting for your body to have to keep up with that, to feel wired and tired and irritated for no reason and to know you're overreacting and not be able to stop it.

And so this is why you always want to take ownership of your mental health and find people who really value that, people who know how to respond to you. So if you have an anxiety disorder, really finding your community of people that understand what you're going through and are celebrating you every step of the way as you improve, because it is, it's one small step at a time in order to heal from anxiety.

Let me tell you, there is so much more to be said on this topic, so don't worry, I will do more episodes where I break this down a little bit more and give you some tangible tips and tools on certain aspects of anxiety. But this episode was meant to be educational to help you destigmatize it and understand there are multiple facets to anxiety.

It's not just a straight shot, clear and cut disorder that everybody has. It's different for every person. And so I would really encourage you today to figure out where is your anxiety on the spectrum, how is it interrupting your life, and is it time to do something about it?

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I want to do a little disclaimer here as a way to empower your sense of wellbeing. If you notice things come up for you when you're listening to this podcast, such as strong emotions, feeling triggered, or feeling stuck, I highly recommend you seek support from a mental health professional in your local state of residence.

You have to remember, triggers and emotional responses are just information that something in your emotional world needs support. There is absolutely no shame in seeking out support from a mental health professional in your local state of residence.

And lastly, if you enjoyed today's show and you don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can subscribe on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts and, if you haven't already, I would so appreciate if you could leave a rating and a review to let me know what you think and help others find this podcast.

You can visit my website at nicolesymcox.com/podcastlaunch for step by step instructions on how to subscribe, rate, and review. Alright, my friends, I hope this was helpful and I will see you next week.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to nicolesymcox.com.