Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

by BRENDA VANTA

How CBT Can Help With Anxiety

By now, you have already made the most important step. You have determined that your anxiety is interfering with your life and needs to be addressed by a professional. The endless worry, fear, and panic needs treatment, but you are unsure what kind of treatment. Surely, the options for mental health treatment are expansive and diverse. Becoming overwhelmed by options including therapy, medication, supplements, chiropractic and others is common.

To avoid the tendency to become confused and frustrated, you may consider a treatment method that has a record of being very effective in the treatment of anxiety and one that offers limited risks and high rewards. That treatment option is therapy. More specifically, it is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). Over the years, CBT has become the preferred therapy type when treating people with anxiety.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is a very safe, effective, and drugless option to help you manage your symptoms. This therapy can be costly. However, if you're willing to be a participant in a study there will be no cost to you; you may also get paid for your time, travelling or other associated expenses. If you consider participating in clinical research for the first time, psychotherapy involves very few risks when compared to those that involve medication.

What is CBT?

CBT is a form of psychotherapy that can help you understand your thoughts and feelings, which influence the way you behave. It is used for various mental and emotional concerns including anxiety, phobias, depression and addiction. This therapeutic style was formed by the contributions of several psychologists in the 1950 and 1960s including Alfred Adler, Albert Ellis, and Aaron Beck.

Largely, cognitive-behavioral therapy is interested in the relationship between someone's thoughts, feelings and behaviors and is based on the concept that these play a crucial role in the way you behave. Therapists trained in CBT believe that these three facets are influenced by the other, and in turn, they influence the others. By controlling your thought, you can take control of your health and improve your anxiety symptoms. For example, if you have a feeling that you do not desire like anxiety, a CBT therapist would focus on the thoughts and behaviors to modify the feeling. If the behavior was undesirable, the therapist would investigate the role of the thoughts and feelings.

CBT operates under the idea that people have faulty thoughts and beliefs called cognitive distortions. Rather than seeing an event or situation as the cause of the anxiety, CBT believes that your analysis of the situation, not the event itself, causes the anxiety. This may mark a major shift in thinking, but it is one that will ultimately benefit your symptoms.

Who is a CBT Therapist?

Someone specially trained as a psychotherapist using CBT, will have a master's degree or higher in a discipline like psychology, counseling, or social work. If you begin Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for anxiety, your therapist will meet with you for weekly appointments that last about an hour. Usually, these appointments will occur individually in their office, but group therapies are helpful as well.

Your therapist will take an active role by providing education about your symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis. A CBT therapist will function as a teacher, coach, and partner during the course of treatment. Depending on your needs, therapy can last anywhere from a few sessions to a few years of treatment. The goal is to gain skills that you can use in a number of situations rather than becoming dependent on therapy or your therapist.

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Methods of Benefit

Cognitive-behavioral therapy was originally designed to address symptoms of depression, but since the principles apply to a number of diagnoses, it has been expanded to include everything from anxiety to psychosis. Here's how CBT can help your anxiety:

- **CBT can normalize your experience.** Whenever you start out in treatment, it may feel like you are all alone. It may feel like no one experiences what you do. CBT works to explore your patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Something interesting happens during this experience as you and your therapist will discover that your tendencies are ones that others go through daily. This will aid in feeling less isolated and more connected, which lowers anxiety.
- **CBT can calm your body and mind.** People with anxiety have issues finding calm and peace. Anxiety works to undo this by adding new, stressful thoughts and by adding undesirable, physical sensations like tension and unease. A CBT therapist can provide education regarding various relaxation techniques and train you in techniques that are the best fit for you. By calming your mind and body, you will be better able to manage stress from the past and whatever stress comes your way today.
- **CBT can retrain your thinking.** CBT believes that people with anxiety have some level of maladaptive thinking. By identifying the thoughts, challenging them, and arriving at a new conclusion, you can change your thinking to go from anxiety-provoking to anxiety-limiting. An example would be you assuming that the worst will happen in a social situation and noting how that assumption creates anxiety. Your CBT therapist would encourage you to reflect on situations where the worst didn't happen and find new ways to anticipate social activities.
- **CBT can retrain your behaviors.** In the eyes of a CBT therapist, the best way to reduce the anxiety is through having you do the very things that trigger fear, anxiety, and discomfort. Many people spend too much of their time avoiding things that make them anxious. This plan works well in small doses, but many people find their comfort zone shrinking over the years. A CBT therapist thinks that over time your body becomes better able to handle the stress that comes from specific people, places, and things. So, the more you experience the situation, the better able you will be to manage the stress. A good example of exposure is therapy for phobias. If you have an intense fear of snakes, a CBT therapist will work with you to create a list of different types of encounters you could have with snakes. You rank them from least anxiety-provoking to most anxiety-provoking and begin exposing yourself from the bottom to the top. This method is called systematic desensitization because it is a formulaic process to reduce your fears through exposure.

- **CBT can foster a sense of control.** Oftentimes with anxiety, it feels like you are out of control. You do not know how you feel or what is making you feel this way. CBT helps by making sense of your symptoms and allowing you to gain power over them. You will learn that relaxation techniques can create calm, retraining your thinking can give you a new sense of optimism, and retraining your behaviors can make even the scariest fears seem within your control. The success you find will be all yours as it will follow you in and out of the therapist's office.

Conclusion

If you are considering therapy for your anxiety symptoms, CBT might be the best answer for you. Luckily, you won't have to go far. Therapists that specialize in CBT are very common and widely available. Try cognitive-behavioral therapy - the only thing you have to lose is your anxiety.

Want to Find a Research Study?

It's easy to find a research study that is in progress. Go to ClinicalTrials.gov and search the keywords 'anxiety Cognitive-behavioral therapy'. Available studies will be displayed. Check the status of the study, and you will see the studies that are currently recruiting patients in green. Learn more about the study to find out whether or not you are a suitable candidate for the study, if the goal of the study matches your own health goals, where it is located, the duration of the study, and the compensation. Note that you will likely deal with lots of medical terminology, especially under the selection criteria; your family doctor can help you understand this part of the process and explain it simply. Next, you contact the doctor or psychologist in charge of patient recruitment; if the investigators of the study are interested and consider you to be eligible, they will contact you and arrange a phone interview. Good luck!