

Cascade Quarterly News

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COMBATING ANXIETY:

The importance of self-care in a hurried society

“The root meaning of the word anxiety is ‘to vex or trouble’.”

Anxiety defined

I like the definition that follows, from Wikipedia, the online free encyclopedia:

‘Anxiety (also called angst or worry) is a psychological and physiological state characterized by somatic, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components. It is the displeasing feeling of fear and concern. The root meaning of the word anxiety is ‘to vex or trouble’; in either presence or absence of psychological stress, anxiety can create feelings of fear, worry, uneasiness, and dread. Anxiety is considered to be a normal reaction to a stressor. It may help an individual to deal with a demanding situation by prompting them to cope with it. When anxiety becomes excessive, it may fall under the classification of an anxiety disorder.’

Taber’s Medical Dictionary has a similar definition of anxiety: ‘A feeling of apprehension, worry, uneasiness, or dread, esp. of the future. Everyone has been anxious at some time. Anxiety is the normal reaction to that which is threatening to one’s body, lifestyle, values, or loved ones. A certain amount of anxiety is normal and stimulates the individual to purposeful action. Excess anxiety interferes with efficient functioning of the individual.’

That is the key right there so I’ll repeat it: *Excess anxiety interferes with efficient functioning of the individual.*

What ‘excess anxiety’ looks like will be different for everyone.

I will borrow a phrase from Carolyn Myss, PhD (Anatomy of the Spirit), an author who I appreciate: ‘your biography creates your biology.’ Just think about that idea for a moment.



Some people are simply more predisposed to tolerating anxiety and stress better than others. There are many factors that make this so: Genetics, past experiences and traumas, current environmental realities in the person’s life, nutrition, their overall state of health and more.

For most people, a time will come in their lives when they are overwhelmed – isn’t this part of the learning of life? What they do about it will pave the way for their future and I promise you

that ignoring the signs of anxiety on your path only make the path bumpier in the days ahead.

The nervous system of a human being is both a delicate and incredibly resilient entity. Just as the wiring of your house is hidden in the walls - only known to us by the light switches and dials that we use every day, we don’t give much thought or care to this system until the lights don’t come on - and the nervous system is often overlooked as well, until something blows!

Then we are most curious about what is wrong and we wonder, “why does the system simply not fix itself”, or in the case of the house, we become suddenly interested in that mass of wires down below. The breaker box is a fascinating thing to a layperson of electricity in the moment when the power goes out!

Imagine if only we could access the breaker box of the body when we ‘blow a fuse’ in our system. Well, perhaps the breaker box is at our disposal all the time...and this newsletter is intended to remind you of the signs of an imbalance and offer you some ideas for how to help restore balance and cope better with anxiety.



when should you see a doctor?

When anxiety symptoms become prevalent in your life, when little things seem large and insurmountable, when you feel that you just can't cope anymore with the reality you are living in...these should be obvious moments to you that something has to change.

Seeking medical help is a sign of courage – not of failure. Please remember this! Those who recognize an imbalance and then reach out to gain support and tools to

help them overcome the moment are far braver and admirable than those who hide their fears and carry on alone.

It can (and often does!) take a severe mishap to motivate us to discuss our worries with our family doctor, or other health care professional, and that's ok; that is living, that is learning.

The main thing is to move forward once you do get help, to make change as needed and

to remember that the tools you gain are yours forever. Stress will return to your life again in the future, you will again be faced with moments of overwhelm or anxiety – and next time you will recover sooner and you will be able to function better within it.

So please see a doctor when needed - your medical team is there to support you and get you back on track so that you can enjoy your life!

“The intensity of the stress experience and its long-term consequences depend on many factors unique to each individual. What defines stress for each of us is a matter of personal disposition and even more, of personal history”

–Gabor Mate, M.D., “When the Body Says No”

my Observation

In my practice of bodywork, I see people every day working toward a more peaceful state of mind by fostering an ability to cope with life's stressors better; and they use **massage therapy** as one tool in this search. I am blessed and honored to be a part of this process, and I see **'relaxation' as being of paramount importance in healthcare.** When we are in a relaxed state, our body is able to restore and the body's healing processes function smoothly on a cellular level. This optimal functioning is simply not physiologically able to occur when we are stressed out! This is a known truth to all students of human biology. We are wired to respond to intense stress in a certain way – and **prolonged stress causes an imbalance in the nervous system,** leading to dysfunction and discomfort.

Chronic pain and anxiety are

often linked – not always, but often. So in my practice over the last 15 years, I have worked with many, many people who ask for my help in managing anxiety in the face of their physical pain. I'm sure you can imagine that when somebody experiences 'burn out' in their nervous system, whether due to prolonged stress, injury or trauma, that their body will respond with discomfort. Through bodywork, we are able to address the 'issues in the tissues' in a gentle, caring fashion, and in a language that the body appreciates and responds positively to.

There is an **emotional component** to 'burn out' that must be mentioned as well. I have noticed over the years that as someone works through the emotional side of their issues, their body responds with change; the pain

patterns tend to subside in severity. There are many medical authors today who have their own anecdotal evidence to support the viewpoint that emotional healthcare is key to the door of chronic conditions. I am happy to say that in recent years our common consciousness has been moving us toward a better understanding of the somato-emotional reality and therefore we have a very good chance at moving forward in our culture, to a place where we deepen our respect of the delicate wiring of the human body and respond with grace.

some Tools

The tools needed to regain balance in the face of anxiety are so individual – it will take trial and error, it will take patience and perseverance to

some Tools continued...

find the right 'prescription' for you. Here are some places to start:

The number one thing is to **slow down!** Give yourself a little space in the day to **reflect**, even 5 minutes of time is ok to start...maybe when you wake up or before bed. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Then listen to the silence. Meditation, prayer, quiet time, whatever term that resonates for you and your beliefs, please return to this tool – there is power in the moments when we stop, become still and check in with our inner wisdom.

I myself love the art of **Dreamwork**. As a child, my Father taught me to analyze the symbolism of my dreams and to use this tool in my problem solving. I learned that our dreams are powerful messages relayed from the subconscious to help us sort through our thoughts and concerns; in the quiet space of half-awake there is an opportunity to listen to these messages and clarity often comes forward.

Breathwork: I know, we all hear about the power of breath so often, that by now you may be sick of hearing about it! Well, what we resist - persists! Believe me the power of breath deserves mention and repetition. Our physiological response to focused breathwork is profound, and I urge you to revisit the myriad of breathing techniques that exist when aiming to get a

handle on anxiety problems. It will help.

Solace: This word alone offers comfort, doesn't it? Solace is achieved sometimes in the simplest of ways: spending a few minutes watching the sun rise or set, sitting at the foot of a giant maple tree and listening to the rustle of the leaves, art, music... **what fills you up? What offers you solace in times of anxiety?** If you do not know the answer to this question than I would suggest that you begin to pay close attention to the events of your week and notice how you react or respond to different moments. Where is the solace in your day?



There are countless techniques used in counseling that can help you to achieve balance – find a **counselor or psychologist** you can trust and try working through things with them for a few months. You may surprise and delight yourself in what you are able to achieve in the face of anxiety. Within you is the innate ability to rebalance your system: the tools may just have to be reawakened, tweaked, added to, remembered and used effectively. Professional counseling is vitally important for people suffering from extreme anxiety – please reach out if you need help.

What about **medication**?

Should I take a prescription to help calm me down? Isn't this a sign of defeat? It may surprise you to know how often I hear these remarks. I have worked with many, many people whose Doctors have referred them for massage therapy as a part of treatment for anxiety problems.

Research indicates that massage is one of the best tools to help with both depression and anxiety. And my experience has shown me that the best treatment plans are multi-layered. The most successful people recovering from anxiety problems are using many tools to do so.

I will tell you that it is not a sign of defeat to accept medication when you need it. We are **fortunate** to live in an era that offers us options in medicine; **options** that our ancestors would have begged for. Do not forget that. The truth is that sometimes medication offers a wonderful **support** that provides **safety from harm, and recovery from injury or illness**. Some medication is used temporarily and others are needed long term. This is a complex issue that requires **honesty and teamwork** on the parts of the patient and the medical team. If you are at risk of harm psychologically, I would much rather see you accept help through medication than cause harm to yourself or others. The risks are too great for this to be ignored. Realize that medication is only **1 tool**, and should be **amongst many** in

“Your medical team is there to support and assist you in your wellness journey. Honesty and trust are the basis of success in this endeavour.”

some Tools continued...

your toolbelt on the path toward well-being. A **Naturopathic Doctor (ND)** is the best resource for prescribing natural alternatives to pharmaceuticals. I suggest you review your supplements with a ND to be sure you are choosing an appropriate combination of remedies.

Exercise: another tool that cannot be overstated. I always encourage people to **find activities they enjoy**. There is no point in joining a gym if you will hate it – because you won't go for long if you don't like it! I highly recommend gym workouts and personal trainers – absolutely - if it is right for the person. Sometimes, though, incorporating a brisk walk into your day is just what you need, and might be enough right now. Get some **fresh hair!** Try out some of the classes at your local rec centre. They are often

affordable and a swim in a pool can be extremely uplifting. Not to mention alternating the swim with a soothing hot tub! Just be open to exercise and you may decide to try something new, or revisit an old favorite. **The nervous system loves exercise!**



Essential oils: I have written in the past about aromatherapy and its benefits as a self-care tool. An easy way to use essential oils to help lessen anxiety is by **diffusing them in your environment** so that you are breathing in the healing molecules through your day. A nice simple tool would be a car diffuser. There are nifty gadgets that plug into your car, and send the healing oil into

the air. It's an easy way to breathe in some goodness while you drive! (driving, by the way has been indicated as one of the most common 'stressors' in our society.) Aromatherapy retailers sell various types of diffusers, so check your local store or an online supplier if you are keen to give this a try. Here is a **blend** that you might enjoy. It is **both uplifting and cheerful** without being too sedating. Called **Orange Joy**, this **blend contains all 3 of the essential oils distilled from the Orange tree**. Truly an orange delight!

Orange 5 drops, Petitgrain 2 Neroli 1. Put the drops directly on the pad of your electric car diffuser, or add to water if using in the house with a candle diffuser.

Read books on stress management: There are countless authors writing

fascinating works about the management of anxiety. A good read that I suggest you check out if you would like to try some different exercises on re-training your mind in how it reacts to stressful moments is: "The Myth of Stress" by Andrew Bernstein. His technique called 'Active Insight' is a refreshing approach that offers much in this day and age. Again, there are many, many wonderful authors on this topic, so visit your local library and browse for what might jump out at you and resonate with your beliefs and experiences thus far.

This list is intended to get you started. Your own personal plan for overcoming anxiety issues will be as individual as you are. **Journal your successes, remind yourself of your blessings and be present in today. I believe in you and your ability to find peace within your journey.**

Square Breathing: to help you detach from the anxiety

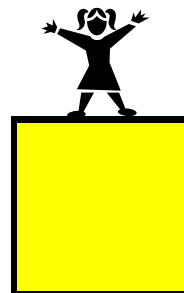
Reprinted from Luann Overmyer's book: 'Ortho-Bionomy, A Path to Self-Care'

This breathing technique called "square breathing" from Pranayama yoga can be used to balance and relax the nervous system so we can be present within ourselves without anxiety or worry. Regulating the breath brings a sense of balanced rhythm to the nervous system. The calm, quiet witness emerges from within this relaxed state. Emotions calm down, the thinking mind quiets, and the body's reflexive nature can access its self-correcting capacity.

1. Begin by inhaling as you count to four.
2. Hold the inhalation for another count of four.
3. Exhale for a count of four.
4. Hold the exhalation for a count of four.

I visualize drawing each side of a square as I count: as I breathe in and count to four, I draw one wall of the square. As I hold my breath for another count of four, I draw the top of the square. As I exhale to a count of four, I

visualize drawing the wall parallel to the first side. As I hold the exhalation for the final count, I draw the bottom of the square. Then I begin again and retrace my square.



If at first this seems too difficult, try drawing a rectangle instead. Breathe in to a count of four, hold for a count of two, exhale to a count of four and hold for a count of two. As you become more accustomed to regulating your breathing pattern, it will get easier to draw and breathe a square.

About Cascade Massage Therapy

My Approach

I bring over 14 years of bodywork experience and education to the massage table! I offer

you diverse and comprehensive massage therapy sessions. Your treatment goals are foremost and your needs will be heard and addressed. I utilize both traditional and alternative treatment techniques, and recommend self care tips and exercise options that evolve with your individual healing process.

My intention is to be a facilitator in the cascade of your healing process and health maintenance. I believe that within the human body is the desire and ability to be

well, and through bodywork, I serve to act as a catalyst for this process.



This is your time - I encourage you to enjoy the stillness of your session, and sense the changes occurring in your body while we work - you don't need to be entertaining or start a conversation; that being said, please recognize that I do not read minds. I expect my clients to participate in his or her experience and give feedback when there is any discomfort during the treatment.

Cascade Massage Therapy is focused on education and prevention. It is important that you know what you can do to help prevent stress, tension, and pain when you are not with me. I allow for time at the end of our session to converse, suggest self care tips and exercises that would be beneficial for you, and answer any questions that you may have.

I believe that prolonged stress, whether environmental, physical or emotional is a primary factor in dis-ease and a true obstacle to healing. Therefore, ***I welcome you to a peace-filled and relaxing environment where you can experience relief from pain and tension.***



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If you have specific health concerns consult your medical doctor.

The information in this newsletter is educational only and is not intended to replace the advice of your personal health care providers.