

Anxiety and Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



In this article we will be discussing addiction and anxiety. This is something that is a big problem in the addiction community. Anxiety is a problem because addiction issues can lead to anxiety and anxiety can lead to addiction. It's a double-edged sword.

Anxiety can be caused by a number of things. There are things like raising children, work, relationships and for many addicts, we may also run into legal and financial troubles. Here is some info I found on pronghornpsych.com: "The Anxiety and Depression Association of America estimates that twenty percent of individuals diagnosed with an anxiety disorder also have a substance use disorder." Some of the reports I've seen go as high as thirty percent. These numbers are quite large. This means this is something that we must focus on and do studies and research to help people that are currently suffering on a daily basis.

I myself battle with anxiety. It's quite an uncomfortable situation when you're feeling anxious. Some of the things I deal with include my body tensing up, increased heart rate, sweating and sometimes it got so bad that my hands would start shaking. Sometimes my anxiety was in response to something in particular and sometimes it came out of nowhere.

This is something that each individual facing this problem must confront. You must learn how your brain works and how you can relieve stress. Stress can ultimately lead to substance abuse which is why you need to face this head-on. We need to understand our mind and body and always be on the lookout for an increase in our anxiety.

So why do we get anxiety? From an evolutionary standpoint, anxiety was actually meant to help us. When we face any type of dangerous situation in which we can get hurt, we feel anxiety. This feeling will last as long as you are faced with danger. This ties into the fight or flight response to help us avoid danger or confront danger if absolutely necessary.

The biggest reason that many of us end up turning to drugs or alcohol is to relieve our anxiety. It's our way of treating our disorder. It's how we self-medicate. If you are battling anxiety, you are more likely to suffer from addiction issues. Some say you are twice as likely to develop some kind of addiction if you are battling anxiety.

So what are some of the symptoms to look for when you are experiencing anxiety? Some of the signs and symptoms to look for can be muscle tension, constant worrying, expecting the worst, trouble sleeping and headaches just to name a few. These symptoms can make us quite uncomfortable which also makes it difficult to go about our daily routine. And some of us worry when everything in our lives is okay. Just getting through a normal day can be a daunting task for someone with anxiety. This is why it's so important to try to find the root cause of your anxiety. Without

discovering the root cause it will be impossible to get effective treatment from a trained professional such as a therapist, psychologist or psychiatrist. Unfortunately only around forty percent of people that have issues actually receive treatment.

For some reason, when it comes to a social anxiety disorder, alcohol seems to be the choice more often or not. People who have been abusing alcohol say that they are drinking to help alleviate the symptoms of their disorder. But sometimes it can have the opposite effect and increase a person's anxiety.

People who do not suffer from anxiety more easily confront an event that causes anxiety and then continue to go about their day while the anxiety lessens and eventually goes away. People with anxiety disorders on the other hand will not be able to go about their day and this affects them in almost every aspect of their life.

Severe substance abuse can lead to much more severe anxiety when the person is sober. This then leads to increased substance abuse.

There are many types of anxiety disorders. This is from the American Addictions Center:

- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
 - In this form of anxiety, the individual suffers from an almost continuous sense of dread that has no specific focus.
- Social anxiety disorder (SAD)
 - People with social anxiety disorder — also known as social phobia — have an unreasonable fear of interacting with others.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
 - This anxiety disorder can develop after an individual experience, a traumatic event, such as military combat, a natural disaster, a violent crime, or a sexual assault.
- Panic disorder
 - Episodes of overwhelming, uncontrollable terror are the hallmark sign of panic disorder.

It is important that not only do you get diagnosed with anxiety, but you also need to fit into at least one of these many types of anxiety. This more targeted approach will help you truly get down to the root cause of your anxiety and help you progress along in your new life of sobriety.

When it comes to diagnosis it is not always so cut and dry as far as picking a subcategory of anxiety and then only using that diagnosis. Some people are actually suffering from more than one type of anxiety. I myself suffer from "Generalized Anxiety Disorder" along with "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." When someone suffers from this type of anxiety, it is not only important to recognize which one of the two might be giving you issues or both might have been triggered at the same time. This means the approach in which to treat anxiety must be tailored specifically to each and every individual. It also needs to be reassessed every time this person has a battle with anxiety. What caused anxiety last time may not be the same cause this time.

So what are the treatments available to those who need them? There are many options available for people that are facing one of these two maladies or have a dual diagnosis. One thing that seems to work quite well is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). From the NIH: Cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBTs) are among the most efficacious psychosocial treatments that social workers can use to treat individuals with anxiety disorders and SUDs. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is essentially a form of talk therapy. This therapy should be done with a mental health professional so they can guide you in your journey and show you the process. CBT can also be used alongside other therapies to deal with different types of traumas and disorders.

Something that should be mentioned is that there are many people that suffer from these afflictions. We may not know the extent to which many people are suffering because these people don't ask for help and are therefore not included in the statistics. So it is impossible to truly discover the real number of people suffering. I think we need ways of reaching out to identify these people. If the current methods are letting people fall to the wayside, I think that means we need to take a look at our current system and make changes where necessary. At the end of the day, it is ultimately up to the patient to reach out for help, but it couldn't hurt for us to do something as far as outreach and encouragement to certain people that are more susceptible to these disorders.

I think that all of us suffering from any type of disorder that affects our addiction need to seek professional help. You need to find the right support and find the correct resources that deal with your issue. Going at it alone very rarely works. The most effective treatment would be the help of professionals. There are many roads to take, but we are all trying to arrive at the same destination, which is sobriety. Choose which parts interest and work for you and which ones are best for you and leave the rest. This is your sobriety and nobody can tell you otherwise.

