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April 4, 2006

Is It Really Anxiety Disorder?

by [Kenneth W. Thomas, RN](#)

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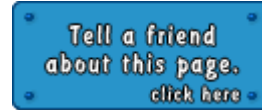
"Doctor, I don't sleep well. I feel nervous for no reason. My hands tremble and my palms sweat at times. Sometimes I feel like my heart beats too hard or is skipping a beat. It scares me. I get moody; sometimes I'm depressed. I can't seem to concentrate at work. What's wrong with me?"

Depending on which kind of doctor he's talking to, he might get medical testing for hypoglycemia, food sensitivities, allergies, metal poisoning or other illness. On the other hand, if the "doctor" he's gone to see is a psychiatrist, or a physician indoctrinated into psychiatric diagnosing, he is likely to be labeled with "anxiety disorder", a so-called permanent brain disease. There are no physical tests for "anxiety disorder" so the diagnosis can be given just based on the symptoms alone. He can even be treated with anti-anxiety psychiatric drugs without medical testing.

But is it really anxiety disorder?

The symptoms described by this person appear on lists of symptoms given for numerous physical conditions as well as the "mental disorder" known as "anxiety disorder". Symptoms of physical illness and "mental illness" are similar, yet the diagnosis and treatment is very different.

Per ADAA (Anxiety Disorders Association of America), anxiety disorders are the most common form of mental illness in the U.S., with 19.1 million (13.3%) of the adult U.S. population (ages 18-54) affected. According to "The Economic Burden of Anxiety Disorders," a study commissioned by the ADAA and based on data gathered by the association and published in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, anxiety disorders cost the U.S. more than \$42 billion a year, almost one third of the \$148



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billion total mental health bill for the U.S.

The top two drugs prescribed for anxiety disorders are Ativan and Xanax. For just those two drugs and their generic equivalents, over 53 million generic prescriptions were filled in 2005, up from 51 million in 2004, which was up 7.9% from 2003 figures as revealed in the magazine Drug Topics, March 2006.

Valium is also prescribed for anxiety disorders. Anxiety is big business, bolstered by drug companies' multi-million dollar advertising campaigns, working hard to convince the public that they have a "mental disorder".

No actual scientific or medical tests are given for the diagnosis of anxiety disorders, only symptoms matter. If you have the symptoms, you have the disorder. However, it's not as simple as that. There are several types of anxiety including "generalized anxiety disorder", the more dramatic Panic Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and Social Anxiety Disorder. Even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and various phobias are lumped under the more general term of "anxiety disorder".

Debates as to the nature of anxiety are rampant and controversial. The "mental health" establishment forwards a "chemical imbalance" theory though this has never been scientifically proven. For the victim of these symptoms, the condition is serious. If one is told that his symptoms are caused by a permanent brain disorder, it's easy to believe. He can feel the symptoms but there is no obvious cause.

It occurs to me, as a Registered Nurse for some 29 years, that we should be more diligent in looking at medical causes for anxiety rather than theoretical, phantom causes. Anxiety has specific symptoms voiced and observed by anyone. A prescription for mood-altering drugs like XANAX and Ativan can certainly negate the symptoms. However, the drugs themselves create their own new set of problems and, if the original cause were a physical condition, the neglected condition may continue to worsen.

Hypoglycemia, metal poisonings and food allergy/sensitivities mimic the conditions of anxiety. These medical conditions can be researched and corrected or controlled with standard medical treatment.

Reporting on the website Onlinelawyersource.com, "Lead poisoning statistics show there are still a high number of people adversely affected by the metal's harmful effects, but these lead poisoning statistics may not even be a real indicator of how serious the problem is.

During the 1960s, 60 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood was considered the level for concern. In the 1980s, this level was lowered even more to 25 micrograms, then

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to 10 micrograms in the 1990s. An April 2003 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine included an article concluding lead levels even below the 10 micrograms can be harmful, especially in children. The researchers wrote, "Our findings suggest that considerably more U.S. children are adversely affected by environmental lead than previously estimated."

The state of Arizona has an active program of screening young people for lead poisoning. This is a medical screening involving a blood test.

On the other hand, "mental illness" screening programs such as the extremely controversial TeenScreen, ask the young people questions in search of symptoms in order to locate those who "need" mental treatment.

There are two significant problems with "mental health" screening. Number one is that the screening is completely subjective – it's always based on symptoms only, no objective medical testing. The accuracy is further skewed by the uncertainty that the children are answering the questions truthfully. The second problem is that the symptoms they screen for and call "mental illness" are the same symptoms that can indicate genuine physical illness or other situations.

TeenScreen's screening instruments are based around the psychiatric definitions of "mental disorders", and a positive on the TeenScreen test leads to a referral to "mental health" treatment.

According to an article by Thomas Smith on the website Consumerhealthreviews.com, "Diabetes, Hypoglycemia, Hyperinsulinemia are so widespread in the United States that it is estimated that over half the population exhibits one or more symptoms of these life destroying diseases.

Symptoms of Adult-Onset Diabetes are now being routinely noted in six year old children. Obesity and its related Endocrine dysfunction are commonly observed in teenagers. Heart Failure, a symptom of advanced Type II Diabetes, remains in the top three killer diseases in the Westernized countries." If a diabetic child were misdiagnosed with a mental disorder and treated only with mood-altering drugs, the diabetes itself would remain untreated, leading to a worsening condition, possibly even the risk of death.

Another startling statistic is related to food allergies. Experts estimate food allergy occurs in 6 to 8 percent of children 4 years of age or under, and in 4 percent of adults according to www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/allergystat.htm. The American Academy of Family Physicians website reports that food allergies can present psychological and neurological symptoms. "There may also be a feeling of "impending doom"--a feeling that something bad is going to happen, pale skin because of low blood pressure, or loss of consciousness (fainting)."

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Symptoms of hypoglycemia can include sweating, nervousness, feeling faint, heart palpitations, hunger, and headache with worsening symptoms being fatigue, dizziness, weakness, confusion and inappropriate behavior and unconsciousness.

Symptoms of lead, mercury or other poisoning include confusion, drowsiness, cold clammy hands, sweating, irregular heart beat, tremors, pain or pressure in the chest, anxiety, moodiness, lack of attention, restlessness, and depression.

The above symptoms of genuine physical illness can be easily mistaken for Generalized Anxiety Disorder, which is defined by muscle tension, sweating, nausea, cold, clammy hands, difficulty swallowing, jumpiness, gastrointestinal discomfort or diarrhea. Psychiatrists focus solely on "mental disorders" which could result in you becoming addicted to a mind-altering drug, without any testing to locate genuine physical illness. Left untreated, these medical conditions can worsen and even become life-threatening.

Moreover, even the treatment for anxiety can be deadly. XANAX packaging contains the following warning: "Certain adverse clinical events, some life-threatening, are a direct consequence of physical dependence to XANAX. These include a spectrum of discontinuation symptoms; the most important being the possibility of seizures."

Anyone who experiences the symptoms of anxiety should look at proven medically tested sources of that feeling and not be so quick to take a drug that may cover up important symptoms to the discovery of real physical illnesses. Anxiety is a sensation of warning the body manifests when there is something wrong and it needs attention. Don't fall into the idea that it is an illness unto itself that needs to be treated because it's uncomfortable. It was intended to be uncomfortable to prompt you, the owner, to do something about it. Seek a medical diagnosis, not a mental label.

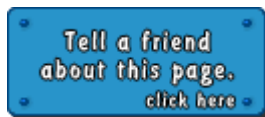
Kenneth W. Thomas is a Registered Nurse with 29 years of experience working in critical care units, emergency rooms, medical-to-surgical units, and psychiatric units. He has written several popular articles which have been published worldwide, including "TeenScreen Calls Physical Illness a Mental Disorder" and a series of informative articles in the "Is It Really" series, which is now being compiled into a book. Look for the upcoming article, "Is It Really Depression?".

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