Dealing with Anxiety and the COVID Pandemic, Part II
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As the conversation continues in our efforts to help control feelings of anxiety while coping and managing this COVID-19 pandemic, there needs to be discussion regarding how the body and mind are connected. Not in the physical sense that the brain is part of the body, or the brain is part of the nervous system as a whole, but how experiencing select emotions affects the way the body reacts, operates, and even recuperates. When discussing anxiety, it is always good to understand how the body recognizes anxiety, and how the body manifests anxiety within the body. Sometimes a person will not think they are anxious at all, but notices that their body is acting strange, or that they are experiencing symptoms that perhaps they may not have previously noticed. Could this be due to an underlying medical illness; possibly. But could a person be experiencing symptoms of anxiety and not be fully aware; absolutely! Chambers Health would like to continue providing patients with information on how to manage anxiety during this pandemic to help decrease the emotional strain on our patients.

ANXIETY AND THE BODY

There is a direct correlation between what the mind thinks and feels and how the body reacts to it. This is known as a synergistic effect. The word “synergy” is defined as the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects. We can think of the “mind” as one agent, and the “body” as another, or the “emotional” and the “physical.” The two work together to help identify, understand, and perceive the world around us. When our mind detects or perceives a situation as being a threat, our body reacts. Some may know this as the “fight-flight-freeze response.” This is the reaction of our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system and is as natural a response as breathing. This is not a deliberate, planned-out reaction. It is an unconscious, immediate, and rapid neurological and biochemical response to a perceived danger. A specific part of the brain, the Amygdala, perceives a threat. This causes the Hypothalamus to send impulses to the endocrine system to release adrenaline, norephedrine, and cortisol. The effects these chemicals have on the body are interesting. Blood pressure elevates. Heart rate increases. Breathing or respirations become more rapid, almost as if you cannot get enough oxygen. Muscles tense up. Your body temperature elevates to the point you start to sweat. Your stomach may begin to ache as digestion slows down considerably. Wow, some of these symptoms sound familiar!

PROLONGED EXPOSURE TO ANXIETY

The Good News: Once the perceived threat has either been eliminated or resolved, the body will go back to a state of normal activity, or homeostasis. The concern is that with prolonged exposure to anxiety, the body may start to show physical signs of distress. Prolonged rapid or short patterns of breathing can lead to increased levels of carbon dioxide in the blood which can lead to dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath, and headaches. Prolonged anxiety can affect the gastrointestinal system as well. Stomach pains, nausea, diarrhea, or Irritable Bowel Syndrome related symptoms can occur. Muscles can become sore due to the prolonged tension, leading to body aches, joint pain, and cramping. Not to mention how anxiety affects the memory. Lack of concentration, forgetfulness, and difficulty making even every day decisions are signs of prolonged exposure to stress and anxiety. Once again, some of these symptoms sound familiar.

There cannot be any denying that the presence of COVID-19 or Coronavirus has changed the way America is doing business, and effects of this virus may not be fully understood for years to come. If you feel that you are experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19 exposure, of course, seek medical advice. But before you do, think about how you are emotionally feeling. Use sound judgment in determining your course of action.

We at Chambers Health strive to continue our tradition of being “What You Need, Where You Are”, and we look forward to serving the health and wellness needs of our communities by providing the best care possible.