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ANXIETY-STRESS RUN WILD

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires a physical, mental, or emotional adjustment or response. Some stress can be good. It keeps us alert, motivated, and ready to avoid danger. Too much stress can make us sick. Stress that continues without relief can lead to "distress", a negative stress reaction. Distress can disturb the body's equilibrium leading to physical symptoms (insomnia, sexual dysfunction, chest pain, headaches, stomach trouble, or high blood pressure). Emotional problems can also result from distress. These problems include depression and anxiety.

Financial, relationship, and family problems, all of these can trigger anxiety and sadness, so we consider these feelings to be normal. These feelings are no longer normal when they become extremely intense, impair everyday functioning and affect the quality of life.

For people with an anxiety disorder, the overwhelming worry and fear is constant, even when nothing is wrong. They worry about everything, and cannot relax. Obsessive thoughts, feelings of panic, trouble sleeping, heart palpitations, cold or sweaty hands, the distress controls their lives. Anxiety is a terrible thing. If you have ever suffered from anxiety you know how disabling it can be. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the United States. Estimates are that it effects 13% of the American population, and costs more than \$42 Billion dollars annually. About half of these costs are associated with the repeated use of health care services. People with anxiety disorders seek relief for symptoms that mimic physical illness. People with anxiety disorders are 5 times more likely

to go to the doctor and 6 times more likely to be hospitalized for a psychiatric disorder than those who don't suffer from anxiety.

Anxiety disorders are treatable, but before treatment begins a doctor must conduct a careful diagnostic interview and examination. If an anxiety disorder is diagnosed, the type of disorder that is present must be identified as well as any co-existing condition such as depression or substance abuse. Not infrequently people misuse substances or engage in damaging behaviors in an attempt to relieve their stress. These may include food, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling, sex, shopping, and the Internet. Rather than relieve the stress, these substances and compulsive behaviors tend to keep the body in a stressed state causing more problems. The person becomes trapped in a vicious cycle.

Treatment of an anxiety disorder may involve medication, specific types of psychotherapy, or both. Medication will not cure anxiety disorders, but can keep them under control while the person receives psychotherapy. The principle medications used are antidepressants, anti-anxiety drugs, and Beta-blockers which can control some of the physical symptoms. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is very useful in treating anxiety disorders. The cognitive part helps people change the thinking patterns that support their fears, and the behavioral part helps people change the way they react to anxiety-provoking situations.

If an anxiety disorder may be affecting you or a loved one, consult with your physician. He may be able to initiate therapy or refer you to an experienced mental health professional.

Please join the WOMEN Committee of Greater Hollywood and Richard J. Wilbur, M.D. for his lecture, "Get a Better Night's Sleep." At Memorial Regional Hospital South on September 8, 2009 at 11:30 AM. For more information, please visit <http://www.safecare.com>, or www.hollywoodchamber.org.

Richard J. Wilbur, M.D. is Board Certified in Internal Medicine.

Office Hours:

*Mondays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM,
Tuesdays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM
Wednesdays 9:00 AM - 7:30 PM
Thursdays 9:00 AM - 12:15 PM
Fridays 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM
Alternate Saturdays 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM*

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