

QUAKER AGING RESOURCES

Anxiety and Change

More information is available through our website:

[www. quakeragingresources.org](http://www.quakeragingresources.org)

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Edited by Patricia McBee, Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends Meetings, 2002, Quaker Press of Friends General Conference, Philadelphia

Rosalynn Carter, Helping Someone With Mental Illness, 1999, Three Rivers Press, New York, NY.

Anxiety Disorders Association of America-
<http://www.adaa.org/>

National Alliance on Mental Health-
<http://www.nami.org/>

Mental Health Ministries-
<http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/>



*“True silence is the rest of the mind;
and is to the spirit, what sleep is to the
body, nourishment and refreshment.”*

William Penn, from PYM Faith and Practice, 2002



Aging Resources Consultation Help



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Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress and affects all of us at one time or another: we are anxious about speaking in public, going to the doctor, or waiting for the results of a medical test. Some anxiety is healthy – it can keep us vigilant about our well-being, compel us to move forward with our lives and inform us of a concern we need to address. However, anxiety that overwhelms or makes it difficult to function may indicate an Anxiety Disorder.

Specific anxiety disorders affect 11% of people over the age of 55, but only a small percentage receive evaluation and treatment. An estimated 17-21% of people over 55 have symptoms of anxiety that do not meet the criteria of a specific anxiety disorder. "Due to the lack of evidence, doctors often think that [anxiety] is rare in the elderly or that it is a normal part of aging, so they don't diagnose or treat anxiety in their older patients, when, in fact, anxiety is quite common in the elderly and can have a serious impact on quality of life," says researcher Eric J. Lenze, M.D.

Older adults are more likely to be facing changes, loss, illness, or dementia that can cause or exacerbate anxiety. Conversely, when one is very anxious one may become forgetful or confused. Although it is usual for anxiety to increase with major life changes, anxiety that disrupts a person's usual activities can and should be evaluated and treated.

Anxiety disorders are among the most treatable of illnesses, and include panic disorders, post traumatic stress disorder, social anxiety, and generalized anxiety disorder. Treatments include medication, cognitive behavioral therapy, desensitization and relaxation techniques, yoga, exercise, and natural remedies.

Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder:

- Excessive, ongoing worry and tension
- An unrealistic view of problems
- Restlessness or a feeling of being "edgy"
- Difficulty concentrating
- Nausea or other stomach problems
- The need to go to the bathroom frequently
- Tiredness and being easily fatigued
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Trembling or tingling feelings in limbs
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Sweating
- Being easily startled

As this list shows, the symptoms of anxiety often mimic symptoms of physical illness and vice versa. An evaluation by a doctor or mental health professional can help sort out the cause of one's symptoms, allowing proper treatment.

How can I help?

A Meeting can provide spiritual support so that the whole person is addressed in the healing process.

How can the Meeting be of support to someone with Anxiety Disorder?

- Challenge stigma and fear of mental illness by educating oneself and others.
- Establish a climate of safety in your Meeting for those with differences or facing major life changes.
- Let Friends know you are there to help. One would not question talking to a person about help they need related to physical illness.
- Offer Clearness Committees for Friends or caregivers experiencing anxiety.
- Remember that feelings are real to all of us. Regardless of how unrealistic a fear may seem, validate the person's feelings. (See Quaker Aging Resources brochure on Validation)
- Provide reassurance, but try not to belittle the person's fear, and remember they may need to work in small steps.
- Encourage but do not push a person with anxiety.
- Refer to professionals. Encourage Friends to see their doctor and/or seek counseling, and provide information about your local resources.
- Offer to walk beside the person on this journey. Even simply accompanying the person to an appointment can support and validate their care.
- A very small group or individual visit can provide spiritual support if the person has trouble attending Meeting. If necessary, meet without the person to hold them in the light, and let them know you are doing so.
- Encourage physical activity, which has the capacity to alleviate anxiety. Offer to take a walk or a yoga class together.