

Anxiety issues:

We had a great turnout on Saturday which was wonderful to see and a very interesting and well received talk given by our guest, Psychologist Anne Foat on Anxiety issues.

Anne began the conversation with a question - "What is anxiety - ?" - which raised some mixed responses from members as to anxiety and its impact in various circumstances , mostly relating to our Meniere's and how it can precipitate , or lead to, a Meniere's episode.

Anne further defined as follows:

" Anxiety is uncertainty, a defence mechanism to make us aware - and it can also be a survival response , which, in certain situations, gets activated and can help us to get through things. Anxiety does not have to be a negative thing, you can work with it and try to understand it so it can also be helpful"

Anne recognised that a problem, when excessive, unrelenting or out of proportion, or when it gets in the way of doing what you want to do, in terms of life goals or daily activities, that we might look at ways of working out how to work with it to improve outcomes rather than adopting avoidance. For example not living our best life by not driving, not visiting a shopping centre , declining invitations to join friends for lunch etc etc. Anxiety thereby causing stress.

She also spoke of the frightening side issues arising and often recurring with anxiety that can cause shortness of breath which in turn changes our oxygen levels, causes trembling, dry mouth, difficulty expressing yourself, sweats, nausea, multiple bathroom trips, blurred vision , chest pain etc , all of which can be, and are, very problematic and related to anxiety. A bad episode of MD can trigger stress, or stress may trigger a bad episode of MD. Stress produces adrenalin and the stress hormone, cortisol (the fight or flight response). Meniere's can, and does, trigger stress, just as stress/anxiety can trigger MD.

Anne drew an analogy of water running down hill forming channels which deepen over time as more water runs through them and unless land management takes place the landscape is secured and erodes away. In like manner, having anxiety take over our daily activities and allowing it to build and erode our self confidence can cause more stress and more issues which would not be effective in our management of MD.

Self management therefore can help alleviate our triggers and help us move forward to a better quality of life.

Working at anxiety/stress management can help so long as we understand we cannot manage everything. perhaps ensure that we have a back up plan , think about how to manage each situation - are there things we can put in place? Learn to better understand our triggers.

People who are anxious often run on the "what if " ?..

We need to better understand that anxiety attacks work on the arousal system and cause high alert, which in turn can cause hyper arousal similar to PTSD patients, and this is the bodies natural response after a bad thing happens and we fear that it could happen again.

So start taking notice of your body, be aware of how you are feeling, what you are thinking, how your body feels , be aware and build up a higher level of awareness . Recognise the emotional part of the mind as well as the thinking part, and use both when making decisions after weighing information carefully. Use management tools such as slow breathing, mediation and/or mindfulness to place yourself in the moment and allow you mind and body to slow and calm.

Another method for assisting reduction of anxiety can involve various techniques found with a body tapping system , where you tap various parts of the body e.g. knees , or the forehead or

skull for short periods, and can surprisingly be very therapeutic. An acceptance of, and commitment to therapy, and adopting some of these tools, works on our thinking and subsequently on the body to help manage anxiety attacks.

Learn to notice and understand what's happening and stay in contact with our surroundings whilst always remembering "that this will pass" - like waves coming in on the sand and then going out again, so these anxious feelings will pass. Go with it, remember and revert to management tools, and recognise that it will pass.

Anne invited questions and a healthy discussion followed on various issues that impact members of the group and relate to higher anxiety levels - such as driving, travelling OS, socialising, shopping etc and other health issues which are also triggers, dietary restrictions etc and how body reacts, and how hyper vigilance returns again and again.

Anne advised that there are various books which can be accessed and may be well worth familiarising ourselves with - one being "The Body Keeps The Score" by Bessel Van Der Kolk. One of our group is currently reading this book and also highly recommended it.

A huge thank you to Anne for so graciously giving her time to talk to, and with, us on a Saturday morning and providing us with so much more to think about and discuss.

Monica Byrnes
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