

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Headaches Linked to Anxiety”

Today we are faced with a multitude of anxiety triggering situations, from the COVID -19 pandemic, to the lock down of entire countries to racial protests and domestic terrorism. Little wonder we have frequent headaches. Anxiety and headaches are both common, and many people experience them from time to time. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, more than 40 million adults in the United States have an anxiety disorder. People with anxiety disorders may have symptoms that interfere with their sleep, relationships, physical health, work or school activities, and everyday life. Scientists are exploring the link between anxiety and headaches. The American Migraine Foundation have reported that 20% of people with episodic migraine and 30–50% of those with chronic migraine have anxiety. A 2016 study found that children with anxiety were likely to have more headaches than children without anxiety. The researchers also concluded that anxiety symptoms were more severe among the children who experienced headaches. Along with the emotional symptoms of tension and dread, anxiety can cause physical symptoms, such as sweating, a rapid heartbeat, digestive problems, and headaches. Headaches can be both a symptom and a cause of anxiety. The most common form of headache is called a tension headache. They usually cause mild-to-moderate pain, although they can sometimes become quite severe, typically develop on both sides of the head, and rarely prevent people from engaging in their daily activities. Migraine headaches are associated with more severe pain and disability. Researchers are exploring the connection between anxiety and headache disorders. Studies have found that people who have frequent migraine headaches tend to experience anxiety and depression more than other people. Migraines usually causes moderate-to-severe throbbing pain, can last for hours or even days, typically develops on one side of the head and may spread and can be disabling and may prevent people from engaging in their daily activities. Behaviors that people display when they are feeling stressed, such as holding their neck in a tense position, grinding their teeth, or chewing gum, can cause a tension headache or trigger a migraine episode. Triggers for headache disorders that have links to anxiety include: too much or too little of caffeine, poor sleeping habits, excessive alcohol use, stress, hormonal changes (such as those that occur due to medication or at the start of a menstrual period), barometric changes, dietary factors, excessive chocolate, caffeine and red wine being common culprit and eye strain. Treatments consist of antidepressants, anti-anxiety drugs and beta-blockers. However, many of these may cause daytime sleepiness. Medications have limited use with migraines.

In the America that I love, we must learn good relaxation techniques. So, try to “chill out” and let the good times roll.

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