



Champion COMMUNITY Page

There is help to overcome anxiety attacks

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

Kathleen (not her real name) was 25 years old when she was rushed to the hospital, convinced she was dying. She thought it might be a heart attack. Instead, emergency room doctors informed her that it was an attack of nerves.

"It started with going to bed one night and having all of a sudden chest pain and difficulty breathing," said the Oakville resident. "I had the overwhelming feeling I was going to die."

That was the debut of an anxiety disorder that has now plagued Kathleen for 15 years.

After that first attack, things went disastrously downhill, said Kathleen.

Within months, her world had shrunk to the square footage of her home, where she remained housebound for six months.

"When it hit me like a ton of bricks I lost my job, lost my apartment, lost my boyfriend and most of my friends," she said. "It's very demoralizing. It kicks the hell out of your self-esteem."

Panic attacks, Kathleen has learned firsthand, are caused by an inappropriate release of adrenaline.

Adrenaline will flood the brain without apparent cause, inciting a fight or flight response.

It's the same response other people would have when faced with an actual life or death situation.

After years of practice, Kathleen has become adept at hiding her attacks. Her two children, aged nine and 11, don't know about them. They believe the limitations on her life are caused by stomach problems.

Those limitations can be severe. Though Kathleen has managed to work up the courage to leave her home, she has not set foot outside Oakville in five years.

Talking can help

Therapy has taught Kathleen that talking can help. She also knows that it isn't always enough.

"You're fighting a chemical. You're fighting adrenaline," she said. "It is something that is very difficult to fight entirely without medication."

Relaxation therapy can go a long way in dealing with anxiety, said Dr. Mary Klein, a clinical psychologist in Milton.

"There are some very basic parts of therapy, and one is relaxation training and breathing exercises," she said. "It helps people use imagery to relax and calm themselves."

Anxiety sufferers tend to be well-groomed, with a hefty strain of perfectionism in their makeup. That's what makes the out of control feeling so difficult, said Dr. Klein.

"It's a double whammy for them, since they already have a stronger need to be in control than some other people do," she said.

While genetics can play a part in the development of anxiety disorders, early childhood experiences can also have a role.

"There are two ends of the continuum. If someone grows up in a very chaotic atmosphere, then the child won't have a sense of basic security," she said.

"They carry around a need for control."

Children of alcoholics or those who grow up in abusive homes fit in that category.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Dr. Mary Klein, a clinical psychologist, says relaxation therapy can go a long way in dealing with anxiety disorders.

"On the other side it can happen in a family where there's too much control. Maybe a parent suffers from anxiety and is over-protective," said Dr. Klein. "They transmit that sense of fear to the child."

The good news is anxiety disorders — an umbrella term which covers panic attacks, agoraphobia, social anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder — are very treatable.

A panic attack at age 30 sent the normally extroverted Deborah Williams into a whiplash-quick downward spiral that left her completely housebound within three weeks.

"I was even afraid to walk outside and go three doors down," she said.

"I couldn't take my son to his baseball games. Suddenly a mother who was very outgoing was afraid of her own shadow."

Housebound not uncommon

Today she is the executive director of the non-profit national organizations Anxiety Disorders Network/Freedom from Fear Foundation (ADN/FFFF).

According to Dr. Klein, becoming housebound — or agoraphobic — is not uncommon.

Though agoraphobia is technically a fear of open spaces, it could just as accurately be described as a fear of fear.

"It really stems from a fear of having a panic attack in public," said Dr. Klein, who is not taking new patients at this time.

Today, the ADN/FFFF fields between 30 and 400 calls a day

from its headquarters in Pickering.

The organization provides information and a referral service for sufferers of anxiety disorders across the country.

For accurate, up to date information on local services, checking in with a nearby chapter of Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a good bet.

Clinics available

The Halton branch of CMHA usually runs two eight-week clinics on anxiety a year, said support service coordinator Lesley Henshaw.

"It's surprisingly common," she said. "The first time we had a clinic, we had over 100 calls."

The CMHA also offers books, tapes, handouts and therapist referrals on the issue.

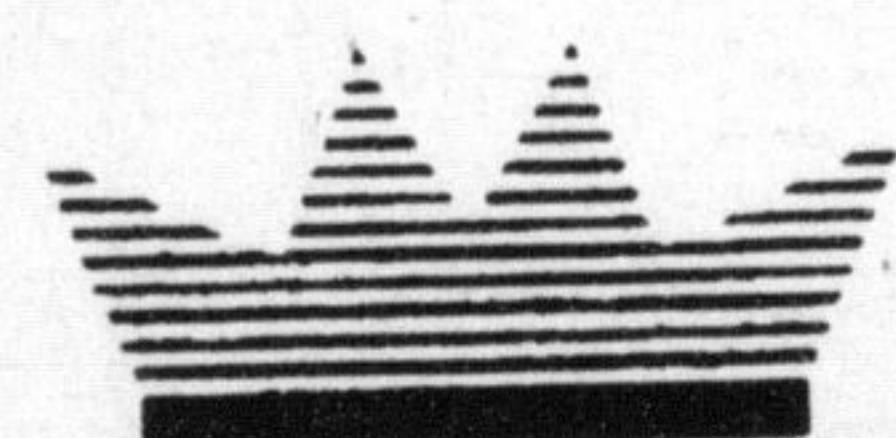
Specifically recommended are the books *Hope and Help for your Shattered Nerves* and *Peace from Nervous Suffering*, both by Dr. Claire Weekes.

Also suggested is *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* by Edmund J. Bourne.

According to ADN/FFFF statistics, about one in 10 Canadians will be hit with an anxiety problem in their lifetime. Approximately one million Canadians suffer from panic disorder.

For more information, call ADN/FFFF at 905-831-3877 or the Canadian Mental Health Association at 905-693-4270.

Book Before
May 15th
Save 15%



King York

PAVING LTD.

Proudly Serving Your Community



INCORPORATED IN 1976

"Don't be fooled
by Imitation
Figureheads,
Trust the King"

- Asphalt Paving
- Interlocking
- Concrete
- Driveways
- Parking Lots
- Main Roads
- Walkways & Curbs
- Excavation
- Grading

Reface your
concrete
porch. Choose
your colour.

Quality & Service

We use heavy-duty equipment for better compaction. All work is guaranteed. References are proudly available. Free estimates.

Local call **257-7283 (PAVE)**

Pager 24 Hours, 7 Days a Week 416-376-8828 or 416-680-2120