

[Intro music]

Zina Peters: Welcome to *On The Couch With Kiwi*, a podcast series at FIU CAPS. I am your host Zina Peters, I am pleased to introduce to you today Dr. Carla Mayorga, a University psychologist at CAPS. She will talk to us today about anxiety. Welcome, Dr. Mayorga.

Dr. Mayorga: Thanks Zina, I'm happy to be here!

Peters: What is anxiety?

Dr. Mayorga: Anxiety is actually quite adaptive. It's a system that we have designed to protect us from future threats to our safety and security, so we need anxiety to survive. Some people come to CAPS wanting to turn off their anxiety and we actually need it, one thing we do is review how anxiety is actually on a continuum. Think of it as from 0 to 10 so most people are in the 3 or 4 level this being the typical baseline and everyone experiences heightened anxiety for situations like taking a test, giving presentations, or walking alone in an unknown area at night. Those are reasons for the anxiety to peak or spike up and come back down to the 3 or 4 range. When someone is chronically in the 6 to 10 range that when we might consider perhaps that there is some difficulty managing anxiety and it's a little more atypical, perhaps there's an anxiety disorder going on.

Peters: What are the different types of anxiety disorders?

Dr. Mayorga: So there are several ways that anxiety can present. One is generalized anxiety, which is basically having excessive worry; worrying way too much about everyday things. On top of that, having difficulty controlling the worry and if this causes things like irritability, fatigue, or muscle tension that would be perhaps considered generalized anxiety, if it's taking place for at least six months. There's also social anxiety, which is basically the fear of being judged or humiliated in particular when meeting new people. So one of the ways that it can present is avoiding social situations like not going to parties, going to places where new people might be, or tolerating these social situations with a lot of anxiety. There's also panic disorder which is when we have or someone has recurring expected panic attacks, and panic attacks are defined as having four physical symptoms of panic. Which could include—there's a variety—

increased heart rate, shortness of breath, feeling dizzy or lightheaded, having tingling in the fingers or numbness. We have specific phobias which is when we have a marked fear or anxiety of a specific object or situation. For example, riding elevators or dogs. And then there are other disorders which used to be classified as anxiety but now they have their own category, which are obsessive and compulsive disorders and also post-traumatic stress disorders

Peters: Who can develop an anxiety disorder?

Dr. Mayorga: So there are a lot of factors to consider including genetic factors, early learning, and important life experiences, so when all of these combine it might expose someone to having an anxious style and that doesn't mean that they're scared of everything. Having an anxious style is someone who sees the world a little more negatively or things as more dangerous than others do.

Peters: How common is anxiety among college students?

Dr. Mayorga: So in general academic psychiatry there was a 2015 study that showed that almost 12% or 11.9% of college students suffer from an anxiety disorder. In 2013 there was a survey of university counseling college counseling center directors of the students that come to CAPS, about 40% of them have an anxiety disorder. So it is really prevalent.

Peters: What are some of the risk factors of anxiety?

Dr. Mayorga: So one of the things people with anxiety do a lot is avoid. Avoiding can have immediate effects such for example not going to class can affect your academic functioning. Or withdrawing socially, not attending social events, can start to affect your ability to connect with people and your support system and so these things can over time or over months perhaps lead to symptoms of depression. The other risk in avoiding, which is really part of anxiety, is that someone perhaps not have the opportunity to learn that the feared situation can be quite tolerable, and that it's something that they can do. And so they don't have that opportunity.

Peters: How can CAPS help students who have symptoms of anxiety?

Dr. Mayorga: So the first thing CAPS can help with is that initial evaluation, so seeing a mental health provider and sharing your concerns and if you think that you have anxiety that goes above what's typical and adaptive. Then a mental health counselor can help you sort through that and help you figure out if you indeed have an anxiety disorder. And then, if needed, treatment recommendations can be provided whether it's at CAPS or elsewhere. That can be individual therapy, group therapy, or medication and it just depends on the diagnosis and the severity.

Peters: What should a student do if they feel they need help managing their anxiety?

Dr. Mayorga: If someone feels that they have more typical anxiety but they just need more help with managing it they can certainly come to CAPS and get that initial evaluation and perhaps work with a counselor for some brief, in person consult. Or maybe do some online modules or even try one of our new workshops that are starting this year in 2019 that actually are specific to managing anxiety.

Peters: Wow! That's great resource that's coming up. I would like to take this time to thank you for joining us Dr. Mayorga.

Dr. Mayorga: Your welcome! I'm so glad I could help.

Peters: If you would like to learn more about CAPS please visit us at caps.fiu.edu, for more podcasts and for more information about our CAPS services. Thank you for joining us today.

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