

ECHO Idaho: Behavioral Health in Primary Care

Generalized Anxiety

November 20, 2019

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Learning Objectives

- Understand differential diagnosis of anxiety and related disorders
- Identify links between anxiety and medical issues
- Increase ability to describe the role of anxiety related to a patient's physical health

Anxiety Disorders

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States
- More than 19% of adults in the US have an anxiety disorder
- Approximately 7% of children aged 3-17 experience significant anxiety
- Most people develop symptoms before age 21

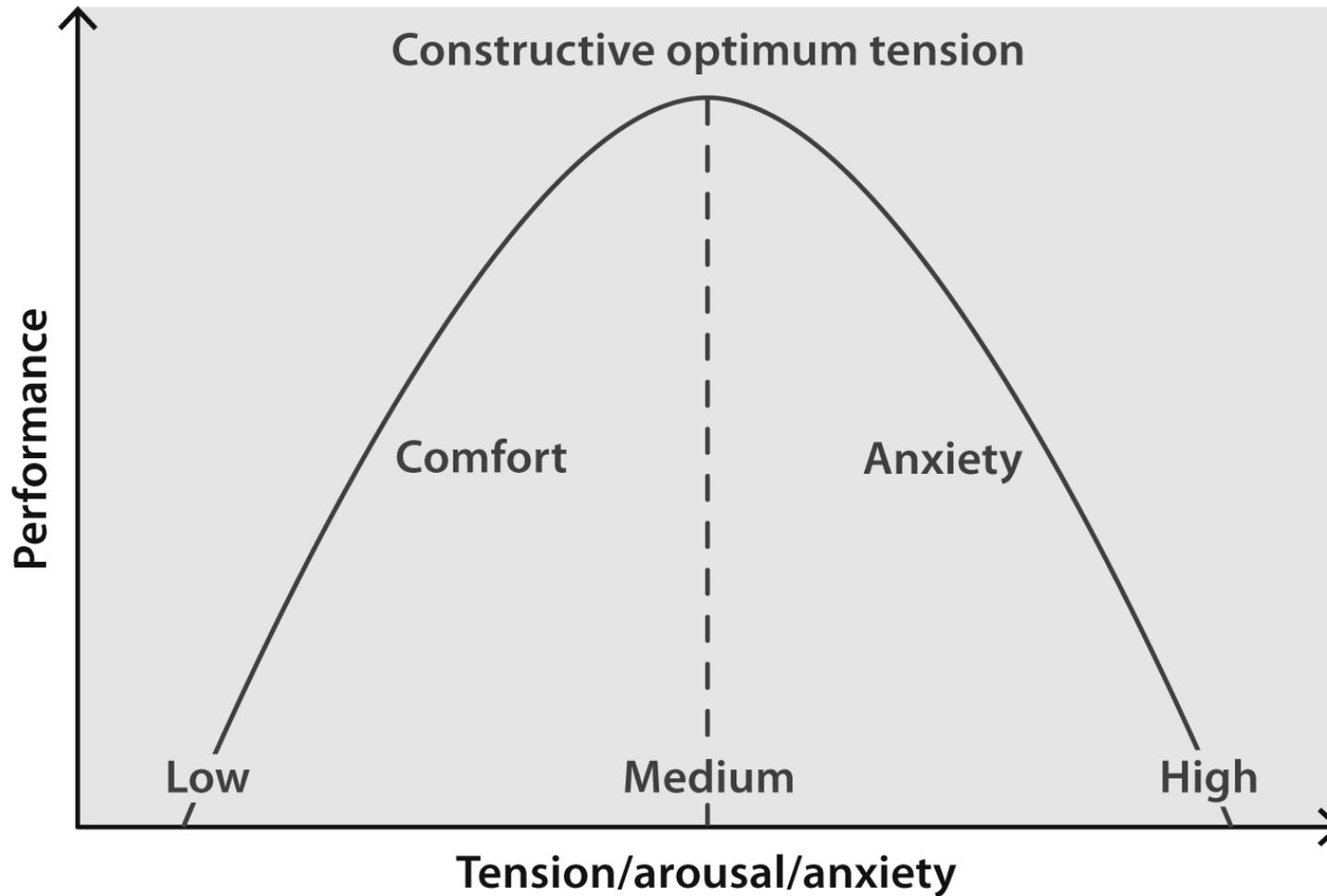
Anxiety Disorders

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Social Phobia
- Panic Disorder
- Specific Phobia
- Selective Mutism
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Other (related):
 - Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - Acute Stress Disorder
 - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
 - Avoidant Personality Disorder
 - Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD)

Differential Diagnosis

- Stress
 - Common and adaptive response to a challenge or adversity
 - Can trigger sympathetic nervous system response, usually minimally
 - Can be either positive or negative
- Anxiety
 - Reaction to stress
 - Often disproportionate to the threat
 - Threats can be real or perceived
 - Overstimulation of sympathetic nervous system
 - Chronic stress can lead to generalized anxiety
- Panic
 - Abrupt burst of intense fear
 - Can occur without an identifiable trigger
 - Significant fight or flight response

Yerkes-Dodson Law



Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Cognitive impact: Excessive and uncontrollable worry thoughts
- Physiological impact: Physical hyperarousal
- Behavioral impact: Avoidance behaviors
- Other key features:
 - Being easily fatigued
 - Difficulty concentrating or staying on task
 - Irritability
 - Muscle tension
 - Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep)
- Diagnosis requires clinically significant impairment of functioning
- Prevalence rate in the US- 3%

Psychobiological Mechanisms

- Sympathetic/Parasympathetic response
 - “Fight or Flight” as an adaptive biological response
 - Increased function
 - Blood pressure/heart rate/respiratory rate, senses heightened, pupils dilate, adrenaline, muscle tension, flushing/sweating, shaking/trembling, changes in blood flow
 - Diminished function
 - Digestive function
 - Reproductive function
 - Immune function
 - One-way communication system

Medical Differential Diagnosis

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Insomnia
- Infertility
- Heart attack or stroke
- Best practices to thoroughly rule out medical/physical causes before referral to psychology/psychiatry

Differential Diagnosis

- GAD vs. ADHD
 - Restlessness and inattention are shared
 - In ADHD, distraction triggered by an external stimulus
 - In GAD, distraction triggered by internal stimulus (worry/rumination)
 - In ADHD, restlessness is innate and not associated with worry and rumination
- GAD vs. Mania
 - Differences in mood
 - GAD- on edge, irritable, negative mood presentation
 - Mania- heightened mood
 - Differences in sleep
 - GAD- need/want sleep, get tired/fatigued throughout the day
 - Mania- less sleep needed/wanted, do not often get fatigued despite lack of sleep

Treatment

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapies
- Mindfulness based treatments
 - Grounding exercises
 - Gratitude practice
 - Focused activities (coloring, sorting, cleaning)
- Biofeedback therapy
- Relaxation training
 - Deep breathing
 - Systematic muscle relaxation
 - Guided visualization/meditation
- Applications
 - Sanvello, Calm, Headspace, etc.
 - Heart rate monitor

Key Points

- Diagnose thoughtfully and only when necessary
- Rule out medical causes for symptoms first
- Diagnosis requires clinically significant impairment
- Educate patients on the biological mechanisms of anxiety
- Anxiety is highly treatable through psychological intervention and/or pharmacological treatments

References

- National Alliance on Mental Health
 - www.nami.org
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America
 - www.adaa.org