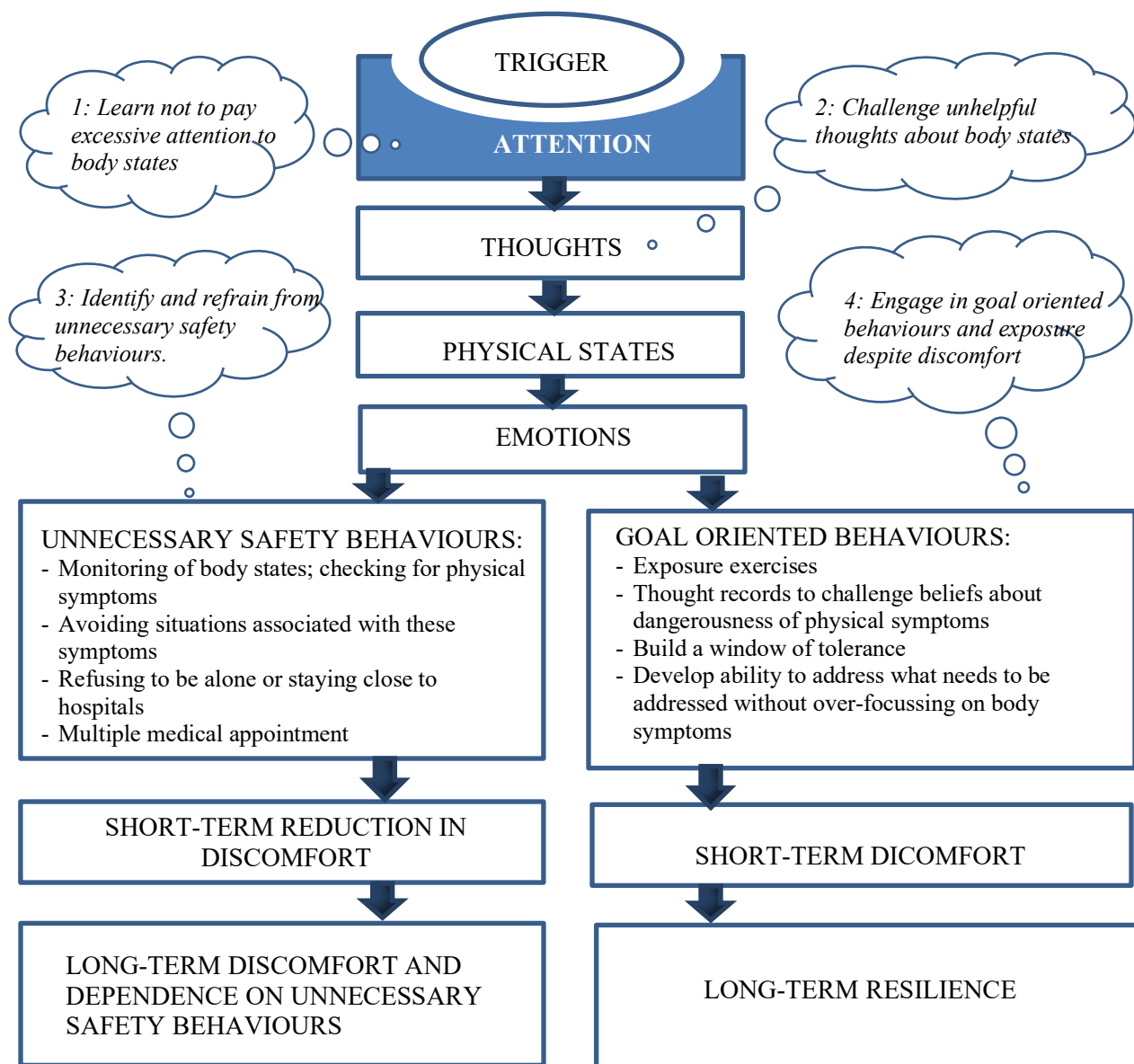


OVERCOMING ANXIETY – 6 BELIEFS ABOUT PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS



TYPICAL BELIEFS ASSOCIATED WITH PANIC AND HEALTH ANXIETY:

- This symptom is not tolerable.
- These symptoms mean that I will die or that there is some as yet undiagnosed illness.
- If I don't stay vigilant about my health, something really bad will happen.
- I cannot go anywhere least I get sick and need assistance.
- Body should always function in a certain way and any difference means that there is some severe illness.
- Any discomfort should be taken care of immediately.

CAUTION:

It is possible to have health anxiety and or panic disorder and be physically ill. You are much better off trusting your physician and going through exposure for symptoms that are clearly related to anxiety. Not doing so, might make it very difficult to diagnose underlying condition. Staying overly vigilant when faced with pain, progressive illness or ambiguous test results will rob you from many life experiences and has no impact on development or treatment of the physical condition.

REACTIONS TO PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Physical symptom	What do you believe this symptom means?	What do you tend to do?	What happens when anxiety is over?
Heart palpitations and chest pressure	I might be having a heart attack; I might die and should not be left alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solicits immediate help; goes to ER often 	I am usually told that there is nothing wrong with me physically; feel exhausted; family and friends are getting frustrated.
Abdominal discomfort and need to use the washroom	That the situation is too much for me to handle; that I might not make it to the washroom on time; that I will never get better and the whole thing is gross.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not eat before outings or during outings - Make sure I stay close to washrooms - Avoid outings and stress as I don't want to be that sick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chronic difficulties with food and digestion - Avoids stress and social activities - Ends isolated at home or preoccupied with body functions
Feeling that my throat is closing on me and does not feel right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is something wrong with my throat; I might have throat cancer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoids eating foods that might scratch the throat in wrong way - Frequent visits at a doctor - Checks throat with a flashlight - Clears throat frequently - Rinses throat frequently - Goes to many medical appointments - Reads information on internet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scratchy throat - Most of the time I am told that there is nothing wrong - Cannot enjoy food - Fears dying of an illness - Anxiety is always there.

FACING UNWANTED PHYSICAL SENSATIONS

We need to learn to tolerate spikes in physical symptoms of anxiety. This ability is very important when going through the exposure exercises because persons who stop the exercise at the height of their emotional response get sensitized instead of getting desensitized. So, how can we challenge ourselves with “body noises” without as yet seeking challenges in the world outside? We can start by inducing body symptoms that mimic panic attacks (interoceptive exposure). Examples of interoceptive exposure tasks include:

- Hyperventilation
- Breathing through a narrow straw
- Shaking head from side to side while keeping eyes open
- Staring intently at a dot on a white page to induce a sense of derealization.
- Quick run up and down the stairs
- Tensing muscle on purpose
- Spinning
- Reclining in a chair and putting something heavy on your chest

Please remember to consult with your family physician if you have a medical condition that might make it unadvisable for you to engage in some of these exercises. These exercises are meant to be uncomfortable, but they ARE NOT meant to be painful.

*Of course, you can just engage in regular exercise until you sweat as it will induce all of the above sensations AND contribute to your overall fitness. If you already have a good exercise routine, notice the similarity between the body sensations that are induced through exercise and panic and that you already know how to tolerate these sensations. **Panic results from misinterpretation of physical sensations in our body.***

COPING WITH FALSE ALARMS AND EASING INTO ANXIETY

- 1) Notice reaction of anxiety
- 2) Remind yourself that you have experienced this reaction many times and managed to get through it even if it was uncomfortable.
- 3) Ask for more. Do not brace for anxiety. Ease into it. This works because stressing about anxiety or monitoring the extent of your anxiety produces the very chemicals that maintain the physical symptoms. As your body starts producing more of these chemicals it takes more time for them to be disposed-off and while the increased volume creates stronger symptoms.
- 4) When panic goes away, remind yourself that you just managed another panic attack that might have been uncomfortable but really was a false body alarm and did not create lasting damage.
- 5) If panic persists, this is likely because you are monitoring your symptoms and impatiently waiting for them to go away. There is a saying that watched water never boils. Same for panic – paying too much attention to the sensations renders them important and prolongs the panic episode.

TO BREATHE OR NOT TO BREATHE...

You might have been exposed to breathing exercises to help you manage your anxiety. ***There is no magical breathing exercise that is better than all the others, just slow down.*** Breathing works because it refocuses your attention from physical sensations of anxiety to your breath. As you slow down your breathing and stop monitoring physical symptoms, your body physical response starts coming down. Breathing techniques will not work if you start stressing about a correct technique or remain highly frustrated with anxiety not dissipating the moment you try to slow down your breathing.

BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENT: TOLERATING BODY STATES

A: PLANNING			
1: Describe a state or physical sensation that you want to learnt to tolerate.		2: Why is your inability to tolerate that state / body sensation a problem?	
3: Describe what you plan to do to learn to tolerate the state / body sensation that you are working on:			
4: What do you predict will happen when you do this exercise?			5: On a scale from 0 to 100%, rate how much you believe your predictions.
B: SELF-MANAGEMENT			
6: Describe what will you do to manage your anxious thoughts, emotions, physical sensations and urges during this exercise.			
What will you do about your thoughts?	What will you do about your emotions?	What will you do about your physical sensations:	What will you do about your behavioural urges?:
C: LESSONS LEARNT			
8: Answer following questions:			
a: What happened as a result this exercise?			
b: Did you experience support all your predictions?			
c: What is your new prediction?			
d: What are your next steps? What will you do in situations that are similar to this one?			
			9: How much do you believe your new prediction (0-100%)