

Body & Mind

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Press the panic button

Shitika Anand finds out what causes anxiety attacks and what you need to do about them

Unless you've been living under a rock, you'll know that two of the most anticipated concerts of the year have been officially cancelled. Pop music sensations Selena Gomez and Zayn Malik recently postponed their stand-alone Dubai gigs citing anxiety and panic attacks as the reasons. Gomez has been diagnosed with Lupus, an auto-immune disease that leads to her pre-performance anxiety attacks, while Zayn Malik has stated that he was anxious about performing solo in Dubai, hence the cancellation of his "one night only" show.

These twenty-something celebrities speaking out about their health and anxiety issues is very significant, since it sheds light on and encourages discussion of an issue that can often be seen as taboo.

"Some amount of anxiety and nervousness is normal as it actually helps you go through your daily routine and move forward," says Dr Iram Ahmedi, counsellor and hypnotherapist at Miracles. "But when these nerves start to cause heart palpitations, excessive perspirations, irritable bowel syndrome and a general incapability to perform, that's when you know you need help."

While those pre-presentation butterflies are normal, Dr Ahmedi says having a positive conversation in your mind and being your own cheerleader is the first step anyone who may experience anxiety needs to take. "Stage fright is a big thing, as when you're nervous, you go in this loop of repetitive, negative thoughts and more into thinking 'what if I can't perform up to my previous standards and how is the audience going to react'. These thoughts keep playing so much in the mind, they incapacitate the person."



Yoga and walking outdoors helps

The symptoms and reasons for panic attacks can vary from person to person, but Dr Ahmedi has an overarching idea of what could be causing them for the current social-media-obsessed generation. "Social media and being hooked to your phone contribute to anxiety because they do not allow you to relax. And one of the key ways of dealing with anxiety is relaxation," she says. "You're always connected, so the stress factor increases, and those personalities prone to anxiety can fall prey to this."

Aside from seeing a professional, Dr Ahmedi has tips on how anxiety can be dealt with at home, or in the office. "Deep

breathing is really effective, doing yoga and going for a walk outdoors also helps," she says.

"If you can work on stopping negative thoughts, that's good too. When at work, have an hour in the day that is your worry o'clock – so only worry in that hour. As irrational as it sounds, it really helps, as you're training your brain to believe that you don't need to worry all day."

Sound advice that we'll certainly be trying in our own office...

From Dhs500 for a private consultation with Dr Ahmedi. Miracles Wellness Centre, Icon Tower, Barsha Heights (04 363 9307).

FOUR TO TRY *Ways to relax in Dubai*

ACRO YOGA SESSION

This homely yoga studio specialises in acro yoga, but only hosts public events on specific dates. The session is followed by an organic food party.

► *Free. Tajitsu House of OM, Street 61 B, V 29, Jumeirah 1 (050 737 5540).*

HYPNOTHERAPY

Unlike what they show in horror films, hypnosis is akin to a dreamless sleep. It helps clear the mind to prevent anxiety.

► *Prices vary. American Center for Hypnotherapy, Nassima Tower, Sheikh Zayed Road (800 017 5701).*

STRESS RELEASE MEDITATION

This yoga, meditation and concentration class follows the simple principles of soul awakening and spirituality, but with more emphasis on relieving stress.

► *Dhs80 per class. Illuminations, Fortune Executive Towers, Cluster T, JLT (04 448 7043).*

THE GREEN PLANET

Wander through this tropical oasis – Dubai's first indoor rainforest park. There are sloths, butterflies and birds to help you reconnect with nature.

► *Dhs70. City Walk, Al Safa Street (800 637 227).*