

Maria Shifrin Ph.D.

7 IMPORTANT THINGS THERAPISTS WISH EVERYONE KNEW ABOUT HIGH- FUNCTIONING ANXIETY

In many ways, high-functioning anxiety is the same as any other type of anxiety, in terms of the way it feels. But one of the key differences is that sufferers are able to tamp it down, hide it, or find a way to use it to their advantage. In the process, it can start to feel like it's not a problem. But that's one of the things therapists want us all to know about high-functioning anxiety — it's still a mental health issue.

"The distress that it is causing the individual — despite the seeming lack of readily identifiable negative impacts on one's ability to function — is still very real," clinical psychotherapist Jeremy A. Montemarano, MA, LPC, tells Bustle. "It is so real, that an individual suffering with high-functioning anxiety and an individual suffering with 'normal anxiety' could literally be experiencing all of the same symptoms but for the significant complications on one's ability to function in their daily life."

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In other words, even though it doesn't cause you to feel completely incapacitated, it *still* might be an anxiety disorder. And you should still consider making healthy lifestyle changes in order to better manage it. Think along the lines of exercising, doing yoga, getting more sleep, seeing a therapist, and even asking about anxiety medication.

Here are a few more things therapists wish everyone knew about high-functioning anxiety, including what it looks like and the ways it can impact us.

1. It Can Seem Beneficial At First

"[People with high-functioning anxiety] strive to be prepared or over-prepared at all times in order to control outcomes, and that's the primary way that they manage their anxiety," Dr. Jennifer Guttman, author of *A Path To Sustainable Life Satisfaction*, tells Bustle. For example, if you meticulously plot out your day, take on too much work, or hold yourself to an impossible standard, it may be a sign.

This differs, of course, from simply enjoying an organized calendar, or wanting to get things done in a timely fashion. When you have high-functioning anxiety, a hyper-strict schedule becomes a way of coping with your feelings. But in many ways, it only creates *more* anxiety — and thus isn't the healthiest way to cope.

2. Others Likely View You As Highly Confident

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High-functioning anxiety can cause you to be structured and highly organized, which in turn can make friends and coworkers assume you're supremely confident — or that you "have it all together." But what they don't know is that it's all **stemming from anxiety**.

"For a lot of people with high-functioning anxiety, they can mask it so effectively you can't even feel their anxiety when you're in a room with them," Dr. Guttman says. "They could feel like the most confident person in attendance."

While everyone's different when it comes to the reasons why they might hide their anxiety, it's often about maintaining appearances, and doing whatever you can to get through the day.

3. Hiding It Can Be Exhausting

Whether you're downplaying your symptoms on purpose, or without even realizing it, constantly ignoring them can be exhausting. "The mental, physical, and physiological effects of wearing (and feeling as though we must wear) a 'mask of wellness' while trying to **manage our hidden anxiety** depletes us of our functional resources," Montemarano says.

That's why it's important to acknowledge when you're feeling anxious — even if you are able to get through the day — and then take the necessary steps to feel better. This might include **adding more self-care** into your routine, getting more sleep, or even seeing a therapist.

4. You May Start To Crave It

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If you've always thought of yourself as an over-achiever, or someone who is fueled by anxiety, take note, as this is something many people with high-functioning anxiety have in common.

"People with high-functioning anxiety often use their anxiety to advance in their careers or towards some personal goal, such as worrying incessantly over a project at work with the belief that this will earn them a promotion," therapist Julie Williamson, LPC, NCC, RPT, tells Bustle. But it's not a very sustainable or healthy way to live.

"Even if they do not appear to be struggling on the outside, eventually their internal symptoms will catch up with them and have some kind of negative impact, be that **on their physical health**, relationships, or just feeling burned out," Williamson says. Again, it's so important to find healthier outlets, and to manage this form of anxiety.

5. Anxiety Is Anxiety

Even if you've found a way to get through your day, despite the fact **you feel anxious**, it's important to remember that your symptoms are very real, and need to be dealt with ASAP.

As Williamson says, "Those who struggle with high-functioning anxiety typically experience the same or similar symptoms to those who struggle with low-functioning anxiety, **including racing thoughts**, ruminating, and incessant worry."

It can be tempting to continue ignoring them, but don't be afraid to **reach out for help**. By speaking with a therapist, you can learn healthier ways to cope with your anxiety, so you don't burn out.

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6. It's Not The Same Thing As Stress

Everyone occasionally feels stressed out at work, or overwhelmed by a busy schedule. But there's a big difference between everyday stress, and actual anxiety.

If you have anxiety, "the most obvious are the physical symptoms: the clammy palms before a meeting or important call, the desire to call in sick [...] the upset stomach, racing heart, difficulty breathing regularly," Dr. Maria Shifrin, PhD, a clinical psychologist in NYC, tells Bustle.

And it can spiral from there. "Despite being able to function, most people with functional anxiety can't seem to find satisfaction in their lives and they don't know why, so they start to blame themselves or the people around them when the culprit is likely something very treatable," Dr. Shifrin says. "Almost always, living in a perpetually anxious and easily irritable state leads to problems with loved ones, coworkers and of course, eventually dissolves ones' self-confidence." So be sure to speak up and get help.

7. You're Definitely Not Alone

If you feel anxious on a regular basis, you're definitely not alone. And if you're ignoring it or trying to tamp it down — as so many people with high-functioning anxiety do — you're in good company, too.

"Roughly 70 percent of the population suffers from some type of anxiety and does not seek help," Dr. Shifrin says. "Most people assume that they are just stressed out at work, or need a vacation or

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some other condition they place on their discomfort, when in reality they are suffering from 'high-functioning anxiety.'"

For many people, the fact they have an anxiety disorder really impacts their day, and holds them back in life. These folks may be more likely to seek help, as they're clearly struggling. But for others with high-functioning anxiety, the problem isn't always so obvious.

It's important to keep in mind, though, that it's not necessary to feel so stressed out. Once you acknowledge that you have high-functioning anxiety, and seek help, you can start to feel better.

Read the original article [here](#).

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