COPING WITH BIOTERRORISM ANXIETY
Advice from the American Psychiatric Association

Washington, D.C. - Fear and anxiety are normal human reactions to a perceived threat or danger. But such uncertainty is manageable if people keep the threat in perspective, the American Psychiatric Association said today.

“The reports and images of the September 11 atrocity and recent bioterrorism are frightening to all of us,” says Richard K. Harding, M.D., APA President. “But knowledge and information based on fact can help us manage our understandable anxiety.”

The Association offers the following advice on how to live with the fear and anxiety caused by the threat of bioterrorism.

• Educate yourself about the potential danger. Facts are frequently less frightening than rumors and myth. The federal Centers for Disease Control is an excellent source at www.cdc.gov.

• If television or other news reports significantly increase feelings of anxiety and helplessness, don’t watch or read them; you don’t need to know every last detail. Television news of violence can be frightening to children, especially when it is viewed repetitively.

• Find ways to distract yourself from thinking about the potential for harm. Get involved in an activity that you can control: work in the garden, clean the basement, do volunteer work, take up an old hobby, take a “time out” and go to the movies or a play.

• Take advantage of the weekends to refuel. A day or so away from normal routine—whether spent at home or on a weekend getaway—breaks the cycle of preoccupation with disaster.

• Talk about your anxiety with family or friends; avoid being alone.

• When you find yourself worrying about the unknown, mentally change the subject.

• Avoid or at least minimize alcohol and caffeine intake; caffeine can add to “the jitters,” and both disrupt sleep.

• Get regular exercise.

• If you smoke, don’t increase your tobacco consumption. While it may seem to ease anxiety in the short run, increased smoking poses significant long-term health hazards.
• If you are uncontrollably fearful and preoccupied with the threat of harm to the extent you cannot continue your daily activities, you should consider talking to your physician or a mental health professional. Symptoms indicate a need for a medical evaluation include but are not limited to:
  - Changes in eating and sleeping habits;
  - Physical problems: stomach upsets, back and neck aches, headaches;
  - Inability to focus or concentrate on the task at hand;
  - Lack of interest in previously enjoyable activities; and
  - Extreme fear of leaving your home.

The American Psychiatric Association is the Nation’s oldest medical specialty whose 38,000 physician member specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders.

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