

Transcript for National Headache Foundation Podcast, HeadWise Episode 179: Find Your Balance: Migraine & Anxiety Insights

Lindsay Weitzel: Hello everyone, and welcome to Head Wise, the weekly videocast and podcast of the National Headache Foundation. I'm Doctor Lindsay Weitzel. I'm the founder of Migraine Nation, and I have a history of chronic and daily migraine that began at the age of four. I'm excited to tell you that I am here today with Doctor Dawn Buse. Hello, Doctor Buse, how are you today?

Dawn Buse: Hi Lindsay, and hi to everyone listening and watching this podcast.

Lindsay Weitzel: We are so excited when she's here. Doctor Buse is a clinical professor of neurology and a psychologist who specializes in headache. She is a very regular guest. She is so knowledgeable. We love to hear what she has to say. And today we are doing a very practical episode on anxiety and migraine or other headache disorders. We are doing an episode where we can do sort of an anxiety checkup.

Lindsay Weitzel: In other words, is it affecting me or is it sneaking up on me? Sort of a thing we hear about anxiety related to a migraine or other chronic head pain all the time, much like depression and migraine. I think it can sneak up on us. and we're just hoping to give everyone the tools to know what to do when this happens, and then recommend some practical steps.

Lindsay Weitzel: So, I always like to set the stage for these types of discussions by bringing up the fact that I feel like when the when anxiety or depression are presented in the setting of migraine, it's often a little bit backwards. I feel like people feel like sometimes they're told they failed in some way, in their mentality when they have migraine, and that's just not how I personally see it.

Lindsay Weitzel: I feel like we have to be super heroes in the setting of our mentality when we have migraine or chronic pain, and so I always want to set that stage first, that, I do feel like we are super strong people for what we go through. And, that that I just want everyone to know that. So I wanted to ask you, Doctor Buse, what are your thoughts on how anxiety is approached or presented in the migraine community?

Dawn Buse: Well, in the medical research, it's well known that anxiety and migraine are co-morbid, and that means that they occur together, more often or at higher rates than chance. also, not surprisingly, anxiety and depression are comorbid, and migraine depression comorbid. So it's kind of a bit of a triad that they're all commonly occurring together. Some people may feel more anxiety, some may feel more depression, some may feel both.

Dawn Buse: and so we know when you go to a headache clinic or even when you go to your health care professional, your primary care doctor, anxiety and depression are commonly assessed at every visit. because they are so common. When we think about anxiety when it comes to migraine, we can think about it kind of specific to migraine.

Dawn Buse: And we often call that the the, the, the the anxiety that happens between attacks. We call it intermix. So we call the attacks that it is it called a time in between the anxiety. And we even have a measure for an instrument for it because it's so common. and we can talk a little bit more as we go through the podcast about all the outcomes.

Dawn Buse: But we were amazed to find what a strong predictor interdicting anxiety was of seeking care for migraine and, seeking treatment and, disability and quality of life. So anxiety is a big player. It's an important key to your well-being when you're living with migraine.

Lindsay Weitzel: Right? I think that is someone who's had, chronic and daily migraine since, since childhood. I didn't really have much of a pain free memory. I think that putting words to that, I like to say it is sometimes I think hard for people who suddenly are just in pain so often to really have that belief that the world is going to take care of them or that they're going to be okay.

Lindsay Weitzel: So I think that the anxiety sort of makes sense, sort of as someone who's been in pain most of my life. So it's not surprising from a practical standpoint. And, and so, I think, I think it's a good thing to talk about and, and get it out there that, you know, it's okay to discuss the anxiety because it really does make sense in the setting of people that are in this much pain and have this disease.

Lindsay Weitzel: so let's.

Dawn Buse: Go on to make sense. It's completely logical. The anxiety is often about things that have happened many times, and that will probably happen again, you know, worry about should I make plans for the weekend? Should I RSVP to this party? Should I plan a vacation? Should I take a promotion at work? Should I take a traveling job? Should I apply to graduate school?

Dawn Buse: They are anxieties about making future plans and having to break those plans, or not being able to live up to the commitments. Worries about what people will say about them or think about them, how they'll be reflected, what might happen in the workplace, what might happen at school. These are all very logical. There are also a lot of anxieties about bigger picture.

Dawn Buse: How do I plan my life when I'm living with this chronic, unpredictable disease? There's worries about how migraine affects one's finances, how it affects your relationship with your children. If you're a parent, how it affects your relationship with your spouse or your partner. If you have a spouse or partner, there are many worries about life with migraine that are entirely logical, and yet we still want to help someone quiet them down and calm them down.

Dawn Buse: It's just hard on your body and your mind to live in this kind of ramped up place. So by ramped up, I'm thinking about the fight or flight response, the sympathetic nervous system being on alert. And it is not easy to be on alert all the time. It's hard on your body. It's hard on your immune system. You get sick more often.

Dawn Buse: It's hard on your weight. You actually gain more weight. It's hard on your on your habits and your wellbeing and your enjoyment of life. It's just a hard way to live. So while they are entirely logical, we do still want to help people kind of quiet and control those worries.

Lindsay Weitzel: Yeah, I think that was a very important way to start this conversation. I'm glad that we went there and thank you so much. So let's go on. So probably what's the next most important question to get this out of the way? Can anxiety make our migraine disease worse?

Dawn Buse: Well, anxiety makes life with migraine harder. Anxiety and migraine combined make quality of life worse. Make disability worse. may make people stop making plans. Stop making commitments because they're worried about what will happen if they have to cancel or can't be there. So the migraine and anxiety together make life really, really difficult.

Dawn Buse: and make people's quality of life much worse. So it's not like anxiety makes migraine attacks worse in the sense of they're more intense or longer or more disabling, but it makes the impact of migraine much worse. So I think we need to think about that and help people understand that, that they're entirely logical to be anxious. and it's really hard to live with that kind of anxiety.

Lindsay Weitzel: Right, and so I think, you know, let's move into maybe some practical strategies that people can use. One thing I think is important to acknowledge is that there's a difference between having a bad day or having a spike in your anxiety and actually having an anxiety disorder. And so I think that's one thing we need to acknowledge. What would you say to that?

Dawn Buse: I think it's really important to acknowledge that as well. I mean, we all have bad days. We all have headaches. We all have, you know, days where we're feeling a little bit more down. We all have days where we're a little bit more anxious, but it's not every day. It's not the, the more days than not, if you're having more days than not where you're feeling really anxious or really down or really sad or really hopeless or really helpless, that's when it's really time to see a professional and get some help.

Dawn Buse: And we also know that there are things that people can do on their own to manage anxiety. So, for example, relaxation strategies can be very helpful. So learning to breathe deeply and slowly can be helpful. There are many different apps out there that are free or low cost that people can use to learn these kinds of skills.

Dawn Buse: Cognitive behavioral therapy is an extremely effective treatment for anxiety and migraine. And it's really one of the, the gold standards, and it's a really skill-based treatment that teaches you to identify thoughts and behaviors that are leading to feelings of anxiety and depression and then to change those thoughts and behaviors in order to improve mood and decrease anxiety.

Dawn Buse: And then finally, we know that certain medications can be very helpful for anxiety. And so there are medications that can be taken as needed, for example, if you're going into a situation that you know is going to make you anxious, you can take a medication as needed. There are also medications that can be taken every day. And so if you're having a lot of anxiety on a day to day basis, it might be worth talking to your doctor about whether there's a medication that might be helpful for you to take every day.

Lindsay Weitzel: Yeah, that's super helpful. And I do want to go back to what you said about the apps. I think that is so important. I think people really need to take advantage of the technology that we have available. And those apps are often free or very low cost. And so it's, it's a great way to access that help.

Lindsay Weitzel: And then I just want to add one thing, too, about cognitive behavioral therapy. You don't necessarily have to go see a therapist. You can also find those kinds of services online. I know that there are websites where you can do therapy sessions online. And so I just want to throw that out there as well.

Lindsay Weitzel: I think that's important, because I think there's still a lot of stigma around mental health. And I think some people might be hesitant to go see a therapist. And so, so just know that there are options out there, even if you're not comfortable going to see someone in person.

Dawn Buse: That's a really good point. And I think that, you know, we know that cognitive behavioral therapy is really effective. We have a lot of research that shows that it's effective. And so it's, it's really important that people get access to it.

Dawn Buse: And, you know, it's also really important to remember that, you know, everyone is different. And so, you know, some people might find that cognitive behavioral therapy works really well for them. Some people might find that medication works really well for them. Some people might find that relaxation strategies work really well for them.

Dawn Buse: So, you know, it's, it's really important to kind of try different things and see what works for you. And, you know, if you try something and it doesn't work, that's okay. You know, you can try something else. And, you know, it's really just about finding what works best for you.

Lindsay Weitzel: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's super important. And, you know, I think the other thing that's really important to remember is that, you know, it's okay to ask for help. You know, if you're struggling with anxiety or depression, it's okay to ask for help.

Lindsay Weitzel: You know, there's no shame in asking for help. And, you know, there are people out there who want to help you. And, you know, there are people out there who care about you. And so, you know, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help if you need it.

Lindsay Weitzel: You know, there's no shame in it. And, you know, it's, it's really important to take care of your mental health, just like it's important to take care of your physical health. And so, you know, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help if you need it.

Dawn Buse: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. You know, there's, there's no shame in asking for help. And, you know, it's, it's really important to remember that, you know, you're not alone. You know, there are people out there who care about you and who want to help you. And, you know, there are resources available to you. And so, you know, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help if you need it.

Dawn Buse: You know, there's no shame in it. And, you know, it's, it's really important to take care of your mental health, just like it's important to take care of your physical health. And so, you know, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help if you need it.

Lindsay Weitzel: Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you so much, Doctor Buse, for joining us today. This has been a really informative conversation. And I really appreciate you taking the time to be here.

Dawn Buse: Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

Lindsay Weitzel: And thank you to everyone who tuned in to watch. We hope you found this conversation helpful. And we'll see you next time on Head Wise.

Dawn Buse: Bye. Take care.

Lindsay Weitzel: Bye.