

When Anxiety is a Problem

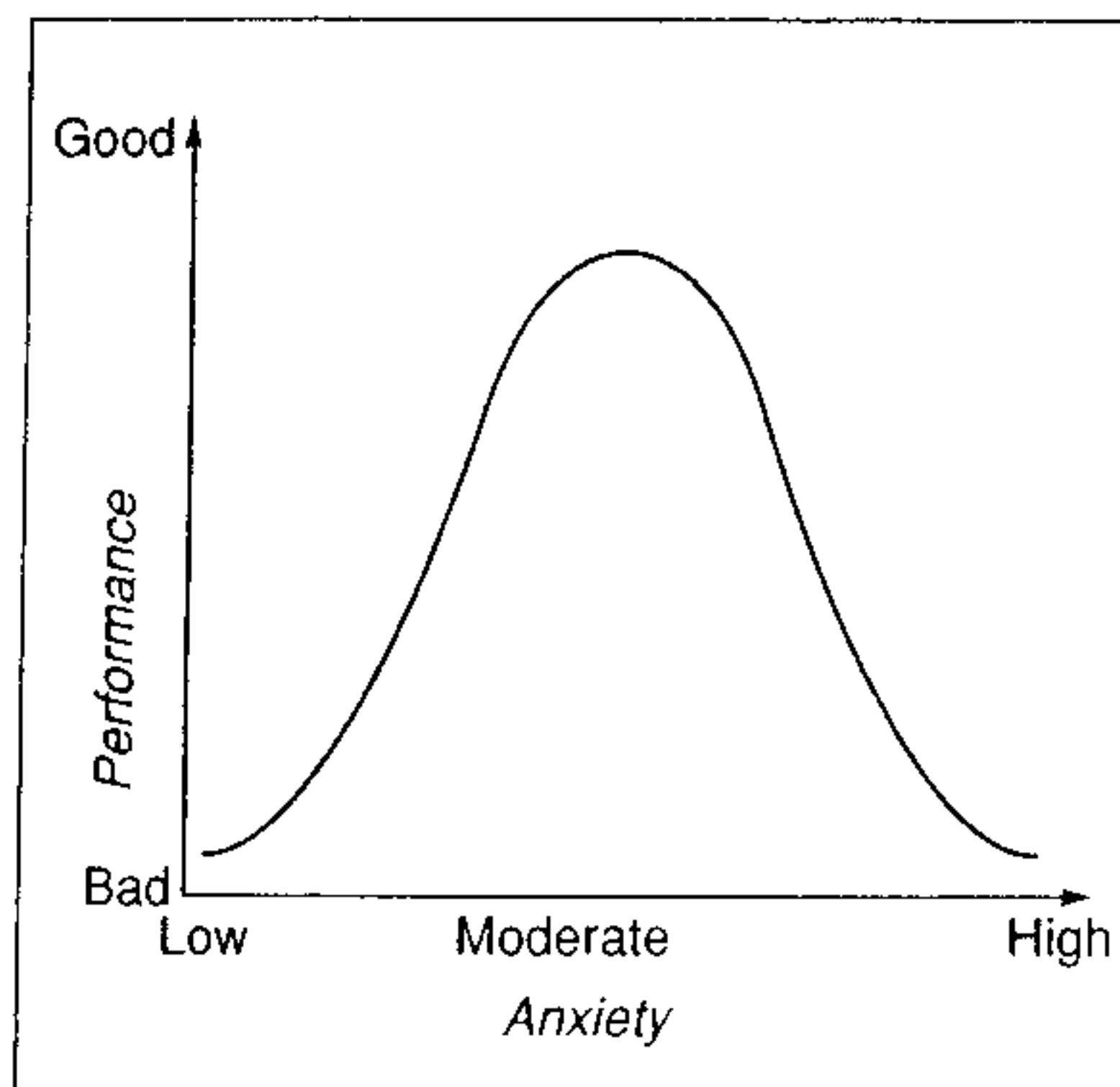
Types of anxiety problem

Tension and anxiety are common problems. About one tenth of the population every year will see their doctor because they feel tense or anxious. In the past doctors have traditionally prescribed drugs for such problems, but over the last few years research has shown that there are more effective ways of treating anxiety. This new approach involves teaching people how to cope, and these methods are similar to learning a new skill such as riding a bicycle or learning to play the piano.

These approaches can help a variety of people whose problems on the surface may take a different form, but who underneath suffer the same unpleasant feelings. Examples include the housebound person who is terrified of going out; the person who is afraid of spiders, lifts, aeroplanes, or small spaces (these problems are called phobias); the person who experiences panic attacks; the person who obsessively checks things such as all the electrical appliances or compulsively washes their hands. Lastly, there may be people who feel generally anxious and who cannot tie their feelings down to anything specific.

Anxiety is a normal reaction

Anxiety is a normal healthy reaction. It happens to everyone at times of danger or in worrying situations. When you are anxious your bodily system speeds up. In certain circumstances this can be a definite advantage. It means that you are ready for action and enables you to respond quickly if necessary. Moderate amounts of anxiety actually improve your performance, spurring you on to greater achievements.



The graph above demonstrates this point. People were given a task to do which involved remembering some numbers. But as they did this they were made anxious, some a little, some a lot, some in between. As the graph shows, when the anxiety was low or high the people did not perform well, but when their anxiety was moderate they did best.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it interferes with our performance or our everyday lives. This is when it becomes necessary to learn how to control it. Remember that anxiety is a normal healthy reaction. You cannot banish it completely from your life but you can learn to manage it.