

Anxiety Disorders

What are anxiety disorders?

An anxiety disorder is a condition that causes fear, panic, or possibly even terror many times during a week. The fears often keep you from doing everyday activities. An anxiety disorder is much more than just feeling nervous or worrying.

What are the different kinds?

There are several kinds of anxiety disorders. Some people have more than one kind. Some anxiety disorders last for a short time. Others may happen over and over throughout life. The most common kinds are:

- ✓ **Anxiety Disorder Due to a General Medical Condition.** Troubles with anxiety and nervousness can be caused by physical problems. Medical conditions such as hormone imbalances, breathing problems, and heart problems can cause anxiety.
- ✓ **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD).** If you have GAD, you worry a lot about everyday problems. You feel tense and nervous much of the time. You often think that something bad is going to happen even when there is little reason for concern. You are not able to stop worrying, even though you know you worry more than other people. Worries often cause physical symptoms, such as headaches, back pain, and intestinal or stomach upset.
- ✓ **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).** If you have OCD, constantly thinking about a certain idea leads to anxiety. You may have a ritual that you follow to help control the anxiety. For example, some people are constantly worried about germs or getting sick so they wash their hands every hour. These rituals interfere with your daily life.
- ✓ **Panic Disorder.** When panic attacks occur without warning, or you have repeated unexpected attacks, it is called panic disorder. These attacks can happen many times a day. You might worry about having these attacks throughout the day. It can interfere with your everyday activities.
- ✓ **Phobias.** Having a phobia means that you feel dread or panic when you face a certain activity, event, or object. Some people fear dogs, heights, or snakes. Some people may avoid going places or doing things because they fear they will have no way to escape or will panic and have no help.
- ✓ **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** PTSD begins after you witness or are involved in a very stressful event. The event usually involves the threat of severe injury or death. PTSD symptoms last for months or years after the event is over.
- ✓ **Social Anxiety Disorder.** Social anxiety disorder, also known as social phobia, is a fear of being embarrassed or judged by other people. The fear is so strong that it keeps you from going places or doing things when you're around other people. You may worry about these things weeks ahead of time.
- ✓ **Substance-Induced Anxiety Disorder.** Drugs such as alcohol, cocaine, and amphetamines can make you feel nervous, worried, or jittery. Stopping drug use for a few weeks usually helps.

What is the cause?

The exact cause of anxiety is not known.

- The brain is made up of cells called neurons, and chemicals called neurotransmitters. These chemicals affect your mood, emotions, and behaviors. The brain cells need the right balance of these chemicals to function normally. People with anxiety often have too little or too much of some of these chemicals in their brain.
- Anxiety problems tend to run in families. Stressful life events and situations also play a major part. Anxiety can be brought on by alcohol or some drugs. Medical conditions can also cause anxiety. Heart problems, breathing problems, lack of vitamins, or thyroid problems can cause anxiety symptoms.
- Anxiety is more common if you have few friends, family, and activities. Poor diet and lack of daily exercise may also make anxiety disorders more likely.

Many anxiety disorders start in late childhood through the young adult years. Anxiety disorders caused by medical or substance abuse problems can start at any age. Some problems come on slowly over weeks or months. Anxiety can also start suddenly.

What are the symptoms?

The signs and symptoms of anxiety may be both mental and physical. The symptoms can be mild, or they may be so intense that you feel panic. Symptoms may be different depending on what kind of anxiety disorder you have. Some common symptoms include:

- ✓ Feeling that your heart is racing.
- ✓ Feeling out of breath.
- ✓ Trouble sleeping.
- ✓ Feeling either tired or keyed up.
- ✓ Muscle aches or tension.
- ✓ Nausea.
- ✓ Trembling or twitching.
- ✓ Worrying.
- ✓ Avoiding situations that may cause anxiety.
- ✓ Fear.
- ✓ Panic.

How are they diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider or therapist will ask about your symptoms. He or she will make sure you do not have a medical illness or drug or alcohol problem that could cause the symptoms.

How are they treated?

Anxiety may be treated with therapy, medicine, or both. The best treatment for you depends on which type of anxiety disorder you have.

For more information, contact:

National Institute of Mental Health
1.866.615.NIMH (6464)
nimh.nih.gov/

Mental Health America
1.800.969.NMHA (6642)
nmha.org

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