



UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

There are various types of anxiety disorders ranging from the very specific (such as phobias) to generalized anxiety disorder (a general sense of dread or apprehension). Some anxiety is good—it can help us to move forward and do our best.

Unlike a mild, brief anxiety caused by a stressful event (like a first date, or public speaking), anxiety disorders will last for at least six months and get worse if they are not treated. This excessive anxiety can cause much distress, and move us into the “fight or flight” reaction. The fighter is just that—constantly on the lookout for some perceived slight, unable to relax. The flier will avoid unpleasant situations or emotionally “check out” in a difficult situation.

Anxiety disorders commonly occur with other disorders such as depression and substance abuse. These other disorders may mask the anxiety symptoms or make them more pronounced.

Some types of anxiety disorders, and their symptoms, are described below:

Panic Disorder: having a panic attack--when you feel intense fear, pounding heart, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, fear of dying or going crazy

Agoraphobia: fear of being in open places or in places where escape is impossible, resulting in limited exposure to the world at large

Specific Phobia: excessive fear and a resulting avoidance of common objects or situations that pose no actual danger (elevators, cats)

Social Phobia: overwhelming and disabling fear of appearing foolish or doing something embarrassing in front of others, leading to avoidance of many potentially enjoyable activities

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: repeated, unwanted thoughts or behaviors that seem impossible to stop or control

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: persistent symptoms after a traumatic event (threats or actual physical injury). Symptoms include nightmares, flashbacks, numbing of emotions, depression, anger, irritability, being easily startled

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: persistent or unrealistic worrisome thoughts and tension about everyday life; expecting the worst without reason. May include physical symptoms such as fatigue, trembling, headache, nausea, muscle tension

WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL ANXIOUS?

Effective therapies for anxiety disorders are available, making it possible to lead productive, fulfilling lives. If you think you have an anxiety disorder, please visit your doctor right away. Your doctor can determine if you have an anxiety disorder, another medical condition, or both.



If it is determined that you do have an anxiety disorder, medications are available that can provide relief. It is also helpful to meet one-on-one with a psychological counselor, focusing on behavioral or cognitive-behavioral therapy. Self-help or support groups can provide a place to share your difficulties and accomplishments with others, while hearing their similar experiences.

Stress management techniques relaxation techniques, and meditation can help with anxiety symptoms, often providing immediate relief while adding to long-term benefits of therapy.

Biofeedback may be helpful in learning to control muscle tension.

The support of family and friends is important in recovering from anxiety disorders. Your family's goal will be to support you, and not trivialize the disorder. At the same time, your family should not help you stay "stuck" in the behaviors associated with the disorder.

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Sources

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