

Learning About Anxiety Disorders



What are anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders are a type of medical problem. They cause severe anxiety. When you feel anxious, you feel that something bad is about to happen. This feeling interferes with your life.

These disorders include:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder.** You feel worried and stressed about many everyday events and activities. This goes on for several months and disrupts your life on most days.
- **Panic disorder.** You have repeated panic attacks. A panic attack is a sudden, intense fear or anxiety. It may make you feel short of breath. Your heart may pound.
- **Social anxiety disorder.** You feel very anxious about what you will say or do in front of people. For example, you may be scared to talk or eat in public. This problem affects your daily life.
- **Phobias.** You are very scared of a specific object, situation, or activity. For example, you may fear spiders, high places, or small spaces.

What are the symptoms?

Generalized anxiety disorder

Symptoms may include:

- Feeling worried and stressed about many things almost every day.
- Feeling tired or irritable. You may have a hard time concentrating.
- Having headaches or muscle aches.
- Having a hard time getting to sleep or staying asleep.

Panic disorder

You may have repeated panic attacks when there is no reason for feeling afraid. You may change your daily activities because you worry that you will have another attack.

Symptoms may include:

- Intense fear, terror, or anxiety.

- Trouble breathing or very fast breathing.
- Chest pain or tightness.
- A heartbeat that races or is not regular.

Social anxiety disorder

Symptoms may include:

- Fear about a social situation, such as eating in front of others or speaking in public. You may worry a lot. Or you may be afraid that something bad will happen.
- Anxiety that can cause you to blush, sweat, and feel shaky.
- A heartbeat that is faster than normal.
- A hard time focusing.

Phobias

Symptoms may include:

- More fear than most people of being around an object, being in a situation, or doing an activity. You might also be stressed about the chance of being around the thing you fear.
- Worry about losing control, panicking, fainting, or having physical symptoms like a faster heartbeat when you are around the situation or object.

How are these disorders treated?

Anxiety disorders can be treated with medicines or counseling. A combination of both may be used.

Medicines may include:

- Antidepressants. These may help your symptoms by keeping chemicals in your brain in balance.
- Benzodiazepines. These may give you short-term relief of your symptoms.

Some people use cognitive-behavioral therapy. A therapist helps you learn to change stressful or bad thoughts into helpful thoughts.

Lead a healthy lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle may help you feel better.

- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week. Walking is a good choice.
- Eat a healthy diet. Include fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains in your diet each day.
- Try to go to bed at the same time every night. Try for 8 hours of sleep a night.
- Find ways to manage stress. Try relaxation exercises.
- Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.