

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety is a normal response to stress. But when it becomes hard to control and affects your day-to-day life, it can be disabling. Anxiety disorders affect nearly one in five adults in the United States. Women are more than twice as likely as men to get an anxiety disorder in their lifetime.

Q: What are the major types of anxiety disorder?

A: The major types of anxiety disorder are:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD).** People with GAD worry excessively about ordinary, day-to-day issues, such as health, money, work, and family. Women with GAD may have muscle tension and other stress-related physical symptoms, such as trouble sleeping or upset stomach.
- **Panic disorder.** People with panic disorder have sudden attacks of terror when there is no actual danger. Panic attacks may cause a sense of unreality, a fear of impending doom, or a fear of losing control. People having panic attacks sometimes believe they are having heart attacks, losing their minds, or dying.
- **Social phobia.** Social phobia, also called social anxiety disorder, is diagnosed when people become very anxious and self-conscious in everyday social situations. People with social phobia have a strong fear of being watched and judged by others. They may get embarrassed easily and often have panic attack symptoms.
- **Specific phobia.** A specific phobia is an intense fear of something that poses little or no actual danger. Specific phobias could be fears of closed-in spaces, heights, water, objects, animals, or specific situations. People with specific phobias often

find that facing, or even thinking about facing, the feared object or situation brings on a panic attack or severe anxiety.

Q: How are anxiety disorders treated?

A: Often, treatment includes counseling (called psychotherapy), medicine, or a combination of the two. Psychotherapy is talking to a trained mental health professional about what caused your anxiety disorder and how to deal with the symptoms. It may involve cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT may help you change the thinking pattern around your fears and change the way you react to situations that create anxiety.

Q: What types of medicine treat anxiety disorders?

A: Several types of medicine treat anxiety disorders. These include:

- **Antianxiety (benzodiazepines).** These medicines are usually prescribed for short periods of time because they are addictive. Stopping this medicine too quickly can cause withdrawal symptoms.
- **Beta blockers.** These medicines can help prevent the physical symptoms of an anxiety disorder, like trembling or sweating.
- **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).** SSRIs change the level of serotonin in the brain. Common side effects can include insomnia or sedation, stomach problems, and a lack of sexual desire.

- **Tricyclics.** Tricyclics work like SSRIs. But sometimes they cause more side effects than SSRIs. They may cause dizziness, drowsiness, dry mouth, constipation, or weight gain.
- **Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs).** People who take MAOIs must avoid certain foods and drinks (like cheese and red wine) that contain an amino acid called tyramine. Taking an MAOI and eating these foods can cause blood pressure levels to spike dangerously. Women who take MAOIs must also avoid certain types of birth control.

All medicines have risks. You should talk to your doctor about the benefits and risks of all medicines.

Q: What if my treatment is not working?

A: Sometimes, you may need to work with your doctor to try several different treatments or combinations of treatment before you find one that works for you.

For more information...

For more information about anxiety disorders, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

MentalHealth.gov, HHS

www.MentalHealth.gov

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), NIH, HHS

866-615-6464 • www.nimh.nih.gov

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

240-485-1001 • www.adaa.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness

800-950-6264 • www.nami.org

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