



# EXAMINING COMMON ANXIETY DISORDERS

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*The signs and symptoms of anxiety disorders may be familiar because most are common reactions to stress. But if symptoms are extreme in their intensity, last for months, are chronic, or more severe than would seem usual for the situation, it can indicate an anxiety disorder may be present. Explore the common types of anxiety disorders and their treatment. You will have the chance to evaluate your own anxiety and find ways to manage it.*

**This mental health e-lesson is available at  
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## EXAMINING COMMON ANXIETY DISORDERS

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- Explore various types of anxiety disorders
- Discover signs and symptoms common to anxiety disorders
- Evaluate your anxiety level using the General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) scale

### WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Many people in counseling or a treatment program have experienced significant anxiety and suffer from an anxiety disorder. About 40 million American adults will experience an anxiety disorder in a year (Emotional Life, 2016). About half the people with depression also meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

The signs and symptoms of anxiety disorders may be familiar because most are common reactions to stress. But if symptoms are extreme in their intensity, last for months, are chronic, or more severe than would seem usual for the situation, it can indicate an anxiety disorder may be present.

Emotional and physical symptoms common in all anxiety disorders are listed below. Mark the ones you have recently experienced.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Racing heartbeat                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Upset stomach or nausea   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trembling  | <input type="checkbox"/> Numb or tingling hands or feet                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty hands  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restlessness                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue or physical weakness                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling tense or jumpy                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor memory or concentration; feeling like your mind's gone blank |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep difficulties (unable to fall or stay asleep) | <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to relax  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constant worry                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability and crankiness                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of apprehension or dread                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tension                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Dry mouth   |

About **ONE IN FIVE** clients with a social anxiety disorder also suffer from an alcohol or substance use disorder.

- Anticipating the worst
- An unrealistic view of problems
- Fear of losing control or being rejected
- Feeling restless, keyed up, or on edge
- Easily fatigued
- Inability to control anxious thoughts

Which of the symptoms mentioned above have been the most troublesome or disruptive in your life?

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## NOTES

## SOME COMMON TYPES OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

### SEPARATION ANXIETY

This disorder refers to excessive fear or anxiety about separation from parent figures or one's home. Children with separation anxiety may cling to their parents or caregivers and have trouble when they are separated. Adults with this disorder may be uncomfortable when traveling independently or being away from their children, spouses, or attachment figures.

### SPECIFIC PHOBIA

A phobia is an unreasonable fear associated with a specific object or experience. Clients with phobias have unwarranted fear and facing a feared object will immediately make him or her feel tense, nervous, and panicky. This is known as anticipatory anxiety, meaning as the person looks ahead, they become increasingly more anxious. A phobia is considered severe when it interferes with life. Common specific phobias include flying, heights, snakes, closed spaces, crowds, insects, and dogs.

### SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

Social anxiety is best defined as an excessive fear of social situations and affects 2-13% of the US population. About one in five clients with a social anxiety disorder also suffer from an alcohol or substance use disorder. Social anxiety disorder is anxiety about social situations that goes beyond shyness. It often includes a fear that they are being watched and judged by others (Emotional Life, 2016). People with social anxiety are often afraid of several situations, rather than one specific thing, such as having trouble speaking in public, interacting with others, or giving a report in a group.

Review the following list of social situations that commonly produce anxiety and mark those causing anxiety or apprehension for you.

- Meeting new people
- Eating or drinking in front of others
- Writing or working in front of others
- Being the center of attention
- Asking questions or giving reports in meetings or groups
- Using a public restroom
- Talking on the telephone
- Being watched while doing something
- Making small talk
- Public speaking
- Performing on stage
- Being teased or criticized

- Interacting with strangers
- Making eye contact
- Attending parties or other social gatherings
- Ordering food in a restaurant
- Initiating conversations
- Being called on in class
- Going on a date
- Talking with “important” people or authority figures
- Taking exams

## NOTES

Social anxiety disorder generally responds very well to treatment, including cognitive behavior therapy and antidepressant medication, or a combination of both.

### AGORAPHOBIA

Agoraphobia is an abnormal fear of being trapped, helpless, or in a situation with no easy means of escape. This disorder may be accompanied by anxiety or panic symptoms, or the anticipation of those feelings. Trigger situations may include being in public spaces, shopping malls, public transportation, or simply being outside one’s home.

### SUBSTANCE/MEDICATION-INDUCED ANXIETY DISORDER

When anxiety symptoms are produced by the use of, or withdrawal from, alcohol or other drugs, substance-induced anxiety disorder may be diagnosed. Symptoms may include nervousness, agitation, restlessness, panic attacks, and apprehension. Use of prescribed medications, alcohol, and illegal drugs such as methamphetamine, cocaine, and others can contribute to the disorder’s severity.

### GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

Everyone worries and feels anxious sometimes. When worry is manageable, we can connect it to realistic problems and take steps to solve those problems and worry subsides. But when worry goes beyond the everyday concerns of life and you are anxious all the time, for no apparent reason, you may be dealing with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). There may be no panic attacks or high states of anxiety, but symptoms may be relatively low-key and chronic, happening more than half the days for at least six months. Worrying constantly, anticipating disaster, having difficulty concentrating, staying focused, or making decisions, being uneasy, and experiencing trouble relaxing or sitting still are signs of GAD and can make it hard to function normally at work or within relationships (Emotional Life, 2016).

### PANIC DISORDER

Panic disorder is a common anxiety disorder in which the client experiences more than one panic episode and often worries about having more of them. Panic attacks are extremely painful experiences and come with physical symptoms including heart palpitations, trembling, shaking, shortness of breath, excessive sweating, gastrointestinal problems, and sensations of choking. The discomfort of a panic attack often triggers avoidance of situations, activities, or environments where they commonly occur.

### PANIC ATTACKS

In addition to these general signs and symptoms, many people with anxiety disorders experience panic attacks. These are sudden and brief periods of intense fear and discomfort, typically producing physical symptoms.

*Panic attacks are sudden and **BRIEF PERIODS OF INTENSE FEAR AND DISCOMFORT** that typically produce physical symptoms.*

## NOTES

The following is a list of panic symptoms. Check the ones you have experienced.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surge of overwhelming panic                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded, or faint |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pounding heart or chest pain                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of being detached from oneself           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating   | <input type="checkbox"/> Numbness, tingling, chills, or hot flashes     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trembling and shaking  | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of immediate death                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shortness of breath, sensations of choking, or feeling smothered | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of losing control or going crazy          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hyperventilating   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea or abdominal distress                                     |   |

One complication to anxiety and panic is the desire to avoid situations and circumstances that provoke a fear response. What situations have you avoided in the past? How has an avoidance pattern added to your overall trouble with anxiety?

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## DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF ANXIETY

Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

		Not at all	Some days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1.	Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
2.	Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3.	Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4.	Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5.	Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6.	Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7.	Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3
	<b>Column Total</b>		+	+	=
			<b>Add totals together</b>		
	If you have checked any of these problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with others?	Not difficult	Some difficulty	Very difficult	Extremely difficult

(GAD-7)

Use the total score, along with the scale on the next page, to help determine your anxiety level.

## SCORING

- 5 - 9** Mild Anxiety Levels
- 10 - 14** Moderate Anxiety Levels
- 15+** Severe Anxiety Levels

Levels greater than ten indicate a possible Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) diagnosis, which can be confirmed by further evaluation by a professional.



## TREATING ANXIETY DISORDERS

There are many effective treatments to help with anxiety disorders and their complexity. The right treatment plan depends on many factors, including the type of anxiety disorder, how you respond to medication and other therapies, your current stress level, and your personal history. By working with a healthcare professional and therapist, you can find the right treatment plan for you.

### THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

Stress is a natural response to change and challenges. The stress response floods your body with adrenaline and cortisol in preparation for “fight or flight,” breathing and heart rate increase, and you get a surge of energy.

One stress management technique is to develop a relaxation response, which brings your system back into balance: deepening your breathing, reducing stress hormones, slowing your heart rate and blood pressure, and relaxing your muscles. Developing a relaxation response is a powerful tool, but requires practice for it to be a useful and natural response. There are many ways to build and strengthen this response, including deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation.

### COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Anxiety disorders are treatable, often with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), anti-depressant medication, or both. With CBT, a therapist helps examine and change the way you think and feel. They help bring awareness to thought patterns and challenge or change them to reduce anxiety. Behavioral therapy helps you to resist the urge to avoid anxiety-producing situations and to learn to replace anxious responses with more positive behaviors. Therapy can teach and model the use of relaxation tools and techniques.

Additional stress management strategies, such as exercise, progressive muscle relaxation techniques, and guided meditation, along with avoiding caffeine, drugs, and alcohol, may also be helpful.

### EXPOSURE THERAPY

Exposure therapy is a CBT-proven treatment method for anxiety disorders. A therapist will help a client safely and indirectly approach their fears by retelling or writing their concerns and worries. This is called “in vivo” exposure and allows the therapist to work in a slow and controlled manner. For instance, to help someone with a fear of flying,

## NOTES

**MOVE FORWARD**  
*with increased  
self-assurance and  
confidence.*

## NOTES

they will gradually work through the fear and may eventually go on a flight together. Exposure therapy helps loosen the emotional punch fear holds over someone and allows them to better handle their anxiety responses. As fear and anxiety lessen and lose their power, symptoms and disruptions to life fade.

### MEDICATION

There are several medication options to help those experiencing an anxiety disorder, usually falling into one of three categories: anti-depressants, anti-anxiety drugs, and beta-blockers. Anti-anxiety medications, while effective, tend to be a short-term solution for handling anxiety are addictive, and can be dangerous. Safer and more common anxiety medications are anti-depressants, including selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs). The response to medication depends on each individual; what works well for one person may not work for another. It is important to work closely with a healthcare provider and find the right medication and dosage to best help you.

### MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY

Managing your stress level is critical to successful recovery. In addition to working with your healthcare provider, try the following strategies to help promote resilience and manage stress and anxiety (Emotional Life, 2016).

Using the list below, select three to five skills you can use to reduce or better manage anxiety. Keep in mind you will have to practice these skills in order to master them.

- Connect with others; family and friends can provide support, fun, and a break from the daily grind.
- Get regular exercise; it is a natural stress-buster.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Get enough sleep to give your body the best chance to recuperate.
- Engage in contemplative practices such as meditation and prayer.
- Make it a regular habit to find time for yourself, relaxation, and fun.
- Learn to ask for help; a healthcare provider can help you find relief from anxiety disorder symptoms.
- Be aware of upcoming duties and future appointments.
- Lighten your load of responsibilities by saying “no” more often.
- Practice breathing deeply.
- Use progressive muscle relaxation.
- Practice your relaxation response.
- Slow your pace and focus on the positive things in your life.

Write down the three to five strategies you chose from the previous list.

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**NEW-FOUND CONFIDENCE**

Anxiety keeps one focused on fear and failures, rather than success and progress. But anxiety can be managed. Resist the urge to avoid stressful and anxiety-provoking situations. Instead, break each task or event into small pieces, then calm yourself using the skills mentioned. In this way, you are stronger with each time you become mildly anxious, rather than getting weaker and more fearful. Practice these techniques in easy scenarios. Build your strength and tolerance, and continue to resist the urge to avoid things that make you anxious. As you lower your general level of stress and anxiety, and build anxiety management skills, you will move forward with increased self-assurance and confidence.



## NOTES

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