

What is Anxiety?

It's safe to say most of us have experienced some form of anxiety. A great example would be how most of us feel before speaking or presenting in front of others. For someone with good mental health, that anxiety can serve as motivation to prepare and practice. Another great example is getting anxious while driving in heavy traffic, but instead of pulling the car to a stop on the side of the highway, a healthy person uses those anxious feelings to stay alert and cautious to avoid accidents.

When feelings of intense fear and distress become overwhelming and prevent us from doing everyday activities, an anxiety disorder may be the cause.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States. An estimated 40 million adults in the U.S. (18%) have an anxiety disorder. Meanwhile, approximately 8% of children and teenagers experience an anxiety disorder. Most people develop symptoms before age 21.

Most Common Forms of Anxiety

Social Anxiety Disorder

More than shyness, this disorder causes intense fear about social interaction, often driven by irrational worries about humiliation (e.g. saying something stupid or not knowing what to say). Someone with social anxiety disorder may not take part in conversations, contribute to class discussions or offer their ideas, and may become isolated. Panic attacks are a common reaction to anticipated or forced social interaction.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

GAD produces chronic, exaggerated worrying about everyday life. This worrying can consume hours each day, making it hard to concentrate or finish daily tasks. A person with GAD may become exhausted by worry and experience headaches, tension or nausea.

Panic Disorder

This disorder is characterized by panic attacks and sudden feelings of terror sometimes striking repeatedly and without warning. Often mistaken for a heart attack, a panic attack causes powerful physical symptoms including chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath and stomach upset. Many people will go to desperate measures to avoid an attack, including social isolation.

notice signs or symptoms

Each Anxiety Disorder has unique symptoms within a group of related conditions. However, all anxiety disorders have one thing in common: persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening.

Emotional symptoms:

- Feelings of apprehension or dread.
- Feeling tense or jumpy.
- Restlessness or irritability.
- Anticipating the worst and being watchful for signs of danger.

Physical symptoms:

- Pounding or racing heart and shortness of breath.
- Sweating, tremors and twitches.
- Headaches, fatigue and insomnia.
- Upset stomach, frequent urination or diarrhea.

Treatment

Empower someone who has an Anxiety Disorder with treatment. Since different disorders have their own distinct sets of symptoms, each type of anxiety disorder also has its own treatment plan. Here are common types of treatment that are used:

Psychotherapy, including cognitive behavioral therapy.

Medications, including antianxiety medications and antidepressants.

Complementary health approaches, including stress and relaxation techniques.