

ANXIETY DISORDER

Anxiety disorders are the most common of all mental disorders. Anxiety disorders are a group of mental illnesses that cause people to feel excessively frightened, distressed or uneasy during situations in which most people would not experience these same feelings.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, each with their own distinct features. These include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Anxiety disorders affect about 20 percent of the population at any given time.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):

When persistent and unrealistic worry becomes a normal way of approaching situations, an individual may be suffering from generalized anxiety disorder. Many individuals with this disorder constantly anticipate disaster and often worry excessively about health, money, family or work. Experts believe GAD is caused by a combination of biological factors and life events.

Symptoms of GAD:

- » Worry excessively about everyday issues for at least 6 months, even if there is little or no reason to worry
- » Constant worries are so burdensome that they interfere with daily activities
- » Unable to relax
- » Have a hard time concentrating
- » Have trouble falling and staying asleep
- » Nausea, headaches, muscle tension and irritability
- » Pounding heart
- » Nausea or stomach problems
- » Weakness
- » Chest pains
- » Lightheadedness or dizziness
- » Chills or sweating
- » Shortness of breath or a feeling of choking
- » Shaking or trembling
- » Feelings of unreality
- » Terror
- » Fear of dying
- » Feeling out of control
- » Diminished capacity for pleasure or loss of interest in activities
- » Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, failure and lack of self-worth

ANXIETY DISORDER *continued*

- » Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying
- » Changes in eating, sleeping or other daily habits
- » Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- » Social withdrawal
- » Unexplained aches or pains
- » Increased feelings of worry or anxiety
- » Thoughts of death or suicide attempts
- » Sleeping too much or too little
- » Decreased energy, fatigue
- » Fear of germs or radiation
- » Fear of hitting someone with a car
- » Fear of burning down the house
- » Fear a family member will die
- » Fear of harming others or violating social norms with unacceptable behavior
- » Excessive personal or house cleaning
- » Developing time-consuming rituals such as constantly checking that a task has been done
- » Compulsively repeating a phrase or name to protect someone from harm
- » Repeating an exacting series of maneuvers until they are performed perfectly

Panic Disorder:

Panic disorder affects between three and six million Americans. Individuals with panic disorder have sudden and repeated feelings of terror known as panic attacks. Panic attacks usually produce a sense of unreality, a fear of impending doom, or a fear of losing control. These attacks can occur at any time and usually last a few minutes. A fear of one's own unexplained physical symptoms is also a sign of panic disorder. People having panic attacks sometimes think they are having heart attacks. These attacks can occur any time and usually peak within minutes.

Symptoms of a panic attack:

- » Pounding heart
- » Nausea or stomach problems
- » Weakness
- » Chest pains
- » Lightheadedness or dizziness
- » Chills or sweating
- » Shortness of breath or a feeling of choking

ANXIETY DISORDER *continued*

- » Shaking or trembling
- » Feelings of unreality
- » Terror
- » Fear of dying
- » Feeling out of control
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Phobias:

Phobias are unreasonable and involuntary fears. Individuals experience extreme anxiety and panic when exposed to certain objects or situations that they logically know are not dangerous. Phobias are thought to be caused by a combination of biological factors and life events. There are three types of phobias: specific phobia, social phobia and agoraphobia

Specific phobia is intense, irrational fear of certain things or situations such as dogs, heights, elevators, water, driving, flying, etc.

Social phobia is also called social anxiety disorder and is an intense fear of social situations that lead to difficulties with personal relationships. Individuals often have an irrational fear of being humiliated for 'saying something stupid' or 'not knowing what to say.'

Agoraphobia often accompanies panic disorder and is a fear of being in any situation that might provoke a panic attack, of from which escape might be difficult.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):

Characterized by repetitive, intrusive, irrational and unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and/or rituals that seem impossible to control (compulsions). Some individuals with OCD have specific compulsions (counting, arranging, cleaning) that they must perform multiple times each day to momentarily release their anxiety that something bad might happen to themselves or to someone they love.

ANXIETY DISORDER *continued*

Common obsessions include:

- » Fear of germs or radiation
- » Fear of hitting someone with a car
- » Fear of burning down the house
- » Fear a family member will die
- » Fear of harming others or violating social norms with unacceptable behavior

Common compulsions include:

- » Excessive personal or house cleaning
- » Developing time-consuming rituals such as constantly checking that a task has been done
- » Compulsively repeating a phrase or name to protect someone from harm
- » Repeating an exacting series of maneuvers until they are performed perfectly