

# Social Anxiety Disorder

Social anxiety disorder — sometimes known as social phobia — is a type of anxiety disorder that causes anxiety or fear in social settings. Someone with this disorder has trouble talking with people, meeting new people, and attending social gatherings. They may feel anxious about others judging or scrutinizing them.

They may understand their fears are irrational but feel powerless to overcome them.

Social anxiety is different from [shyness](#). Shyness can make socializing, school, and work difficult, but it doesn't disrupt life to the same extent as social anxiety. Social anxiety is persistent and overwhelming and may affect everyday activities, such as shopping for groceries.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), around [15 million](#) American adults have social anxiety disorder. It often starts during the teenage years.

## Symptoms of social anxiety disorder

For a person with social anxiety disorder, social interaction may lead to:

- [blushing](#)
- [nausea](#)
- [sweating](#)

- trembling or shaking
- a rigid body stance
- difficulty speaking
- feeling as if their mind goes blank
- dizziness or [lightheadedness](#)
- [rapid heart rate](#)

Psychological symptoms may include:

- intense worry before, during, and after a social situation
- avoiding social situations or trying to blend into the background if you must attend
- self-consciousness and fear of doing something embarrassing
- concerns that others will notice you're stressed or nervous
- feeling a need to consume [alcohol](#) to help face a social situation
- missing school or work because of anxiety

Everyone feels anxious at times, but people with social anxiety have a constant fear of being judged by others or humiliated in front of them.

They may avoid all social situations, including:

- asking a question
- job interviews
- shopping
- using public restrooms
- talking on the phone
- eating in public

Some people have limited or selective anxiety. For example, they may only be anxious when eating in front of others or talking with strangers. People with severe symptoms may avoid all social settings.

[Is it shyness or social anxiety? And how can I overcome shyness?](#)

## What causes social anxiety disorder?

The exact cause of social anxiety disorder is unknown, but it [may result](#)[Trusted Source](#) from a combination of factors.

Physical, biological, and genetic factors likely play a role, according to [scientists](#). Problems with neurotransmitter systems may lead to imbalances in the hormones serotonin, dopamine, and glutamate. These brain chemicals help regulate mood.

Environmental factors may contribute, but only as part of a complex interaction that also involves biological and genetic features, some [experts](#) say.

Factors that may contribute include a history of:

- emotional, physical, or other kinds of abuse
- negative interactions with peers
- overcontrolling parenting styles
- having an insecure attachment style

Negative experiences may lead to a type of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), where social anxiety is a symptom.

Anxiety disorders can run in families, but it's unclear whether this is due to genetic or environmental factors.

What types of phobia are there apart from social phobia?

## Diagnosing social anxiety disorder

There's no medical test to check for social anxiety disorder, but a doctor will likely use criteria from the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition \(DSM-5\)](#) to establish if social anxiety disorder is likely.

They will likely ask about:

- your symptoms
- your family history
- other health conditions

The criteria for assessing social anxiety disorder, according to the DSM-5, are:

- a fear of one or more social situations that could involve scrutiny from others
- having a fear of acting in a way that will lead to a negative evaluation by others, or upset or offend others
- a specific situation nearly always provokes fear or anxiety
- the person either avoids the situation or attends with intense anxiety or fear
- fear is out of proportion to the threat
- fear or anxiety is persistent, usually lasting 6 months or more

- fear and anxiety disrupt daily living
- other symptoms or health conditions cannot explain the fear and anxiety the person feels

They may also wish to rule out other conditions, such as:

- a substance-related issue
- a personality disorder
- concerns about a health issue, [obesity](#), or a physical characteristic, such as a facial burn

## Treatment for social anxiety disorder

Several treatment options can help with social anxiety disorder. How well a therapy works will vary between individuals. Some people only need one type of treatment, but others may need a combination.

A primary care doctor may prescribe treatment, or they may refer you to a psychologist or other mental health specialist.

Options include the following:

### Counseling therapy

Counseling [involves](#) [Trusted Source](#) talking, either one-on-one or in groups. Counseling sessions are available face to face or online.

**Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):** [CBT](#) helps you learn new ways to manage anxiety, for example, how to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.

**Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT):** In [ACT](#) people learn to use mindfulness, acceptance, and behavioral strategies to be more present and figure out how to live a value-based life despite negative feelings.

**Group therapy or a support group:** This helps you learn social skills and techniques to interact with people in social settings. Working in a group will help you see that you're not alone and enable role play of practical solutions.

**Exposure therapy:** In this type of therapy, a healthcare professional will help you gradually face social situations rather than avoiding them.

[What is online group therapy?](#)

## Medication

Medications can help improve your symptoms and help you function in your daily life.

Medications that can treat social anxiety disorder [include](#) [Trusted Source](#):

- [selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors \(SSRIs\)](#), such as [paroxetine](#) (Paxil) and [Sertraline](#) (Zoloft)
- [selective norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors \(SNRIs\)](#), for example, venlafaxine (Effexor)
- [propanol](#)

SSRIs and SNRIs can take [several weeks](#) [Trusted Source](#) to have an effect, but propanolol is a short-acting drug that you can use when you need it.

You may start with a low dose and gradually increase your prescription to avoid side effects. If you're unhappy with one medication, the doctor may offer an alternative.

The doctor will explain the benefits and risks and help you decide which treatment is right for you.

[What are the side effects of antidepressants?](#)

## Home remedies

Home and natural remedies can support the treatment recommended by your doctor.

Tips to address stress and anxiety include:

- [breathing exercises](#)
- [mindfulness and meditation](#)
- exercises, such as [yoga](#) and [tai chi](#), to help manage stress
- avoiding [caffeine](#) and other stimulants
- establishing a regular [sleep routine](#)
- learning about [anxiety](#) and its effects
- finding a trusted person to talk with honestly, such as a friend, therapist, or family member
- knowing the signs and when to seek help
- getting [regular exercise](#) and eating a [balanced diet](#) to boost your overall sense of well-being