

# Anxiety Disorder

## Symptoms and causes

### **Overview**

Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. However, people with anxiety disorders frequently have intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. Often, anxiety disorders involve repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks).

These feelings of anxiety and panic interfere with daily activities, are difficult to control, are out of proportion to the actual danger and can last a long time. You may avoid places or situations to prevent these feelings. Symptoms may start during childhood or the teen years and continue into adulthood.

Examples of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder (social phobia), specific phobias and separation anxiety disorder. You can have more than one anxiety disorder. Sometimes anxiety results from a medical condition that needs treatment.

Whatever form of anxiety you have, treatment can help.

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## **Symptoms**

Common anxiety signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom

- . Having an increased heart rate
- . Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- . Sweating
- . Trembling
- . Feeling weak or tired
- . Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- . Having trouble sleeping
- . Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- . Having difficulty controlling worry
- . Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

Several types of anxiety disorders exist:

- . **Agoraphobia** (ag-uh-ruh-FOE-be-uh) is a type of anxiety disorder in which you fear and often avoid places or situations that might cause you to

panic and make you feel trapped, helpless or embarrassed.

- **Anxiety disorder due to a medical condition** includes symptoms of intense anxiety or panic that are directly caused by a physical health problem.
- **Generalized anxiety disorder** includes persistent and excessive anxiety and worry about activities or events — even ordinary, routine issues. The worry is out of proportion to the actual circumstance, is difficult to control and affects how you feel physically. It often occurs along with other anxiety disorders or depression.
- **Panic disorder** involves repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks). You may have feelings of

impending doom, shortness of breath, chest pain, or a rapid, fluttering or pounding heart (heart palpitations). These panic attacks may lead to worrying about them happening again or avoiding situations in which they've occurred.

- **Selective mutism** is a consistent failure of children to speak in certain situations, such as school, even when they can speak in other situations, such as at home with close family members. This can interfere with school, work and social functioning.
- **Separation anxiety disorder** is a childhood disorder characterized by anxiety that's excessive for the child's developmental level and related to separation from parents or others who have parental roles.
- **Social anxiety disorder (social phobia)** involves high levels of

anxiety, fear and avoidance of social situations due to feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness and concern about being judged or viewed negatively by others.

- **Specific phobias** are characterized by major anxiety when you're exposed to a specific object or situation and a desire to avoid it. Phobias provoke panic attacks in some people.
- **Substance-induced anxiety disorder** is characterized by symptoms of intense anxiety or panic that are a direct result of misusing drugs, taking medications, being exposed to a toxic substance or withdrawal from drugs.
- **Other specified anxiety disorder and unspecified anxiety disorder** are terms for anxiety or phobias that don't meet the exact

criteria for any other anxiety disorders but are significant enough to be distressing and disruptive.

## **When to see a doctor**

See your doctor if:

- . You feel like you're worrying too much and it's interfering with your work, relationships or other parts of your life
- . Your fear, worry or anxiety is upsetting to you and difficult to control
- . You feel depressed, have trouble with alcohol or drug use, or have other mental health concerns along with anxiety
- . You think your anxiety could be linked to a physical health problem
- . You have suicidal thoughts or behaviors — if this is the case, seek emergency treatment immediately

Your worries may not go away on their own, and they may get worse over time if you don't seek help. See your doctor or a mental health provider before your anxiety gets worse. It's easier to treat if you get help early.