



Patient education: Social anxiety disorder (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What is social anxiety disorder?

People with social anxiety disorder feel very anxious in social situations. They often fear that they will be embarrassed in front of other people. The anxiety can be so bad that it can keep the person from doing things they want and need to do in their lives.

Some people have social anxiety in many different situations (for example, at meetings or parties). This problem is sometimes called "social phobia." Other people have social anxiety only at certain times (for example, speaking or performing in front of people). This problem is sometimes called "performance anxiety."

What are the symptoms of social anxiety disorder?

People with this problem often avoid social activities, mostly because they:

- Worry about being embarrassed in front of other people
- Fear that others will say bad things about them

Some people have physical symptoms if they go to social events. They might:

- Avoid looking at or talking to other people
- Blush
- Sweat
- Tremble
- Have a very fast heartbeat

How is social anxiety disorder treated?

Treatments include:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) – In this type of therapy, you talk with a psychologist or counselor about the things you think and do. Then they help you change how you see your situation and how you react to it. This teaches you how to cope better with your anxiety.
- Medicines – Some medicines used to treat depression can relieve anxiety, too, even in people who are not depressed. Your doctor or nurse will decide which medicines are best for your situation.

Some people have CBT and take medicines at the same time.

What if I want to get pregnant?

If you take medicines to treat social anxiety disorder, speak to your doctor before you start trying to get pregnant. Some of the medicines used to treat anxiety might cause problems for babies, so you might need to switch medicines before you get pregnant.

What will my life be like?

People with social anxiety disorder often have to deal with some anxiety for the rest of their life. For some, anxiety comes and goes, but gets bad during times of stress. The good news is, many people find good treatments or ways to deal with their anxiety.

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