Clinical Psychology Associates of North Central Florida
Quick Reference Guide To:

Anxiety Disorders

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Anxiety disorders are treatable illnesses that bring on feelings of overwhelming fear that is strong enough to affect everyday life. In the United States, about 40 million adults (18% of the population) are affected by anxiety disorders every year. Anxiety disorders are not the same as the brief worry that goes along with a stressful event, like a test or first date. Anxiety disorders last at least 6 months and may get worse if not treated. Anxiety disorders affect the mind, body, and behavior and can cause difficulty at work, school, and in relationships with family and friends.

Common Anxiety Symptoms

- **Worry or fear that something bad might happen**
- **Trembling, twitching, or feeling shaky**
- **Fatigue or restlessness**
- **Muscle tension or jitteriness**
- **Feeling dizzy or lightheaded**
- **Fast heartbeat or breathing rate**
- **Sweating, cold, or clammy hands**
- **Dry mouth, nausea, or diarrhea**
- **Irritability, impatience, easily distracted**
- **Difficulty swallowing**
- **Memory problems**
- **Hot or cold flashes**

The National Institute of Mental Health described five common types of anxiety disorders:

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD): Excessive anxiety and worry, along with other physical and behavioral problems, that lasts for at least six months**

- **Social Phobia (commonly referred to as Social Anxiety Disorder): A constant fear of situations in which a person may be exposed to possible judgment from others**

- **Panic Disorder: A sudden, uncontrollable attack of terror that can show itself as racing heartbeat, dizziness, shortness of breath, and a feeling of being terribly frightened or out of control**

- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD): Repeated, interfering and unwanted thoughts that cause anxiety, and is often combined with ritualized behavior that relieves the anxiety**

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Caused when someone experiences an extremely distressing or traumatic event. Common symptoms are recurring nightmares, flashbacks, and unprovoked anger.**

Assessment should begin with a medical evaluation to rule out physiological causes of excessive anxiety such as thyroid or other metabolic or medical conditions. Left untreated anxiety disorders can become worse with time and can wear down coping skills, resulting in a secondary major depressive disorder. Maladaptive attempts to self-medicate can result in alcohol or substance abuse and dependence, which usually make anxiety symptoms worse. In some cases of panic disorder, development of profound avoidance (agoraphobia) can develop and interfere greatly with daily functioning.

Anxiety Disorder Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

FAQ: What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

Genetics, biochemistry, environment, and a person's psychological profile seem to contribute to the development of an anxiety disorder. Typically, a thorough examination is performed to verify the cause of the anxiety before treatment can begin.   It is not unusual for anxiety to be misdiagnosed.   If anxiety is caused by a medication or substance abuse, then it is not considered an anxiety disorder.   The National Institute of Mental Health reports that most anxiety disorders are accompanied by other health problems such as depression, substance abuse, <u>eating disorders</u>, or other mental illness.

FAQ: How are Anxiety Disorders Treated?

Anxiety disorders are treated in many ways, but the most effective forms of treatment are <u>cognitive-behavioral therapy</u>, medication, or a combination of both. Treatment options depend on each person's situation and preferences. Cognitive-behavioral therapy teaches several techniques to stop unwanted thoughts and behaviors. Some of these techniques are deep breathing exercises and changing thinking patterns. Exposure therapy is also effective and it encourages patients to gradually face a feared situation with the intention of overcoming fears.

FAQ: What about medication for anxiety disorder?

Medication is prescribed when symptoms of anxiety cause problems in everyday life.   It is also important to note that many patients can reduce or discontinue psychiatric medication with a course of effective psychotherapy for anxiety. Group therapy, hypnotherapy, and self-help support groups can also be effective.

If a person experiences anxiety for longer than 6 weeks, a mental health professional should be consulted.

If you feel you might have an anxiety disorder and wish to schedule an appointment for an initial assessment or treatment, call *Clinical Psychology Associates of North Central Florida* and find out how we can help.

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<u>Overcoming Social Anxiety Disorder</u>

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