

ANXIETY

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Contents

Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

When does anxiety become a problem?

What are the different types of anxiety disorders?

What causes anxiety disorders?

What help is available?

How can I help myself?

Where do I go for help?

**“Anxiety does
not empty
tomorrow of
its sorrows,
but only
empties today
of its strength.”**

Charles Spurgeon

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a natural and normal reaction everyone experiences from time to time. People feel anxiety in situations that they think are threatening or dangerous in some way. Sometimes anxiety, when not too intense, can be helpful, such as when trying to cross a very busy road or doing something risky.

Anxiety affects a person's thoughts, feelings in the body, and behaviour or actions.

When a person is anxious, their thoughts are focused on what could go wrong, and it can become very difficult to concentrate on other things.

Along with a change in thinking, changes occur in the body. This is known as the Fight-Flight response. The Fight-Flight response prepares the body to deal with a threat or danger. These changes can include an increase in heart rate, more rapid breathing, sweaty palms, feeling shaky, and dizziness or feeling light-headed.

When someone is feeling anxious, their behaviour can also be affected. This could involve trying to leave the situation causing anxiety, or doing something that helps reduce the anxiety. For example, when giving a speech, a way to reduce anxiety might be to avoid looking at the audience.

When does anxiety become a problem?

Anxiety becomes a problem when it stops people from living their lives the way they want to. Problem anxiety can take various forms, including:

- Avoiding certain places that the person would like to, or need to, visit (e.g. a shopping centre)
- Avoiding meeting new people out of anxiety about embarrassing themselves
- Difficulty controlling worries to the extent that a person cannot do their job properly
- Needing to spend more than an hour a day doing things to prevent their anxiety, such as cleaning or checking
- Panic attacks that appear “out of the blue”
- Fear that anxiety will make them go crazy, lose their mind, or have a heart attack

Other symptoms that tend to be linked to problematic anxiety include:

- Frequently feeling irritable or uneasy
- Excessively worrying about things
- Having difficulty relaxing, concentrating, and sleeping
- Developing elaborate plans to avoid certain places, situations or objects

What are the different types of anxiety disorders?

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Unrealistic and excessive worry accompanied by feeling tense, irritable, difficulty relaxing, and/or difficulty sleeping

Agoraphobia

Fear of being in a situation where escape is difficult or where a panic attack may occur

Specific Phobia

An intense fear of a particular object or situation



Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)

Fear of being judged negatively by other people

Panic Disorder

Repeated panic attacks along with fear that the panic attack itself will cause something very frightening to occur, such as complete loss of control, going crazy, having a heart attack, and/or dying

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is characterised by the presence of either obsessions, compulsions, or both. Obsessions are persistent, intrusive and unwanted thoughts that frequently disrupt a person's life. Compulsions are repetitive actions or rituals that are performed to ease anxiety or prevent a feared event from occurring

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Feelings of uncontrollable fear associated with a traumatic experience, resulting in a person feeling high anxiety in their daily life even several months after a trauma

What causes anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders are usually caused by a combination of factors.

Genetics and temperament

Anxiety disorders often run in families, and this may partly be caused by children inheriting genes that make them particularly sensitive to anxiety. A timid or introverted temperament, or personality style, is linked to an increased chance of developing an anxiety disorder.

Parental factors

Parents who have an anxiety disorder themselves are more likely to have children who develop an anxiety disorder, through their child observing their parents' anxiety situations, and learning from it. Parenting styles that are controlling and overprotective have been linked to the development of anxiety disorders.

Thinking (cognitive) style

Certain styles of thinking have been linked with social anxiety disorder. A "looming" cognitive (or thinking) style is a tendency to think about and pay attention to thoughts about upcoming dangers and risks. This thinking style has been linked with anxiety disorders.

Negative experiences and life events

Experiencing negative life events, such as ones that are stressful, traumatic, and uncontrollable, are factors that increase the chance of developing an anxiety disorder. When negative life events happen that are upsetting and out of our control, this can lead to anxiety about uncertainty in the future, and anxiety about more threatening events or situations occurring.

What help is available?

Anxiety disorders are highly treatable. Scientific research indicates that several treatments are effective in reducing anxiety for many people with anxiety disorders.

- Psychological therapy known as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
- Applied relaxation
- Medication
- Self-help
- Online CBT therapy

Some of these therapies are more strongly suggested for certain anxiety disorders than others (for example, certain forms of self-help have been shown to be effective in treating Panic Disorder).

What can I do to help myself?

Make an appointment with your doctor or GP to talk about your anxiety, and possible treatment options, such as seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist.



**ANXIETY
DISORDERS
AFFECT 14%
OF AUSTRALIANS**

Where do I go for help?

The WayAhead Directory

is an online resource providing a comprehensive list of mental health related services in NSW.

www.WayAhead.org.au

Phone Lines

WayAhead Mental Health
Information Line

1300 794 991

Contact your doctor or Local GP

Local community Mental Health
Service

Useful Websites

WayAhead

understandinganxiety.org.au

information about anxiety, and links to anxiety support groups

BeyondBlue

beyondblue.org.au

information about anxiety

Australian Psychological Society

psychology.org.au

1800 22 4636

Information about anxiety and contact details for psychologists who treat anxiety disorders

The Virtual Clinic - online treatment programs for anxiety

www.virtualclinic.org.au



Translating & Interpreting Service
(TIS) 131 450

Please call the Mental Health Information Line through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). Free to Australian citizens or permanent residents.

References:

Cochrane review www.cochrane.org

NICE guidelines www.nice.org.uk

Disclaimer

This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed.

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The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.

Last reviewed by Emma Pinn 2016

**“ I found people who
understood exactly what I
was going through ”**



