



Anxiety

What is anxiety? Anxiety is feeling fearful and nervous about everyday situations, or fear of the unknown. Most people feel anxious from time to time, and it is normal to feel anxious in unusual situations or when making difficult decisions.

Anxiety can become a problem when it interferes with carrying out your regular activities. When anxiety continues for months and becomes far more troubling than you would expect in the situation, doctors call it an “anxiety disorder.”

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety?

- Feeling nervous and worried
- A sense of panic or dread
- Difficulty solving problems
- Muscle tension
- Trembling and shaking
- Difficulty breathing
- Sweaty palms
- Upset stomach
- Racing heart or rapid pulse
- Headaches
- Getting angry easily
- Mood swings

What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

The causes of anxiety disorders aren't fully understood. Some disorders are explained by genetics. Life experiences such as stressful or traumatic events appear to trigger anxiety attacks in some people who are already prone to anxiety. Sometimes anxiety runs in families.

For some people, anxiety may be linked to a medical illness. Some disorders of hormones can directly lead to anxiety. Others are related to the use of specific medicines or drugs, or withdrawal from drugs or alcohol. Some medical problems are often accompanied by an anxiety disorder, especially if the disease is not getting better.

Why Is It Important To Treat Anxiety Disorders?

An anxiety disorder can prevent a person from having a good quality of life and can even make their health worse.

Untreated anxiety may worsen the following problems:

- Depression (which often occurs with an anxiety disorder) or other mental illness
- Substance abuse
- Trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- Stomach or bowel problems
- Headaches and chronic pain
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Problems functioning at school or work
- Poor quality of life
- Thoughts of suicide

Treatment of Anxiety Disorders

Tell your doctor about your anxiety. If you have an anxiety disorder, your doctor may prescribe a medication. He or she may refer you to a mental health professional for advice about medicine or for psychotherapy (“talk therapy”). The doctor may also discuss things that you can do to help manage your own anxiety.

Control of anxiety is made easier if you keep track of its ups and downs, and share this information with the doctor.

Keeping Track of Your Anxiety

Keep a daily log of your anxiety level to share with your doctor. Rate your anxiety using a number scale of 0 to 10: 0 = No Anxiety to 10=Severe Anxiety.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No Anxiety			Moderate Anxiety				Severe Anxiety			

Medical Treatments

The doctor may begin with treatment of a medical condition that may be causing anxiety. He or she may also prescribe a drug that should be taken every day in order to prevent anxiety. The most common ones used for this are known as antidepressants or anti-seizure therapies, and can work for anxiety.

The doctor also may prescribe a drug that can be taken as needed, if the anxiety flares. These drugs are usually sedatives. Be sure to take these medications only as prescribed.

Talk to your doctor about what to expect when taking these medicines, including:

- Benefits and side effects of each medication
- Risk for serious side effects based on your medical history

- Whether the medications may require making changes in your life
- Cost of each medication
- Other medications, vitamins, and supplements you are taking and how these may affect your treatment
- How to stop the medication if it is not working or is causing side effects.

Your doctor will adjust the treatment over time. Be sure to tell your doctor about how well the medications are working to improve your symptoms.

Self-Help: Stress-Reducing Activities

There may be things that you can do to manage your own anxiety. A professional may be able to teach you a relaxation therapy. There are different types, but all involve learning how to use the mind to bring about a relaxed state.

Other things that may be helpful:

- Limit caffeine
- Limit alcohol and illegal drugs
- Learn what ‘triggers’ your anxiety and avoid them
- Talk to family, friends, clergy or a counselor about your stress

Patient Education Series

Anxiety

When your symptoms are managed, you will:

- Enjoy activities and have more energy
- Enjoy family and friends
- Feel less stress and anxiety
- Get better sleep at night
- Have a better quality of life

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