

Anxiety Disorders

Most people experience feelings of anxiety before an important event such as a big exam, business presentation or first date. Anxiety disorders, however, are illnesses that cause people to feel frightened, distressed and uneasy for no apparent reason. Left untreated, these disorders can dramatically reduce productivity and significantly diminish an individual's quality of life.

How Common Are Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental illnesses in America; more than 40 million are affected by these debilitating illnesses each year.

What Are the Different Kinds of Anxiety Disorders?

Panic Disorder- Characterized by panic attacks, sudden feelings of terror that strike repeatedly and without warning. Physical symptoms include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, abdominal discomfort, feelings of unreality, and fear of dying.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder- Repeated, intrusive and unwanted thoughts or rituals that seem impossible to control.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder- Persistent symptoms that occur after experiencing a traumatic event such as war, rape, child abuse, natural disasters, or being taken hostage. Nightmares, flashbacks, numbing of emotions, depression, and feeling angry, irritable, distracted and being easily startled are common.

Phobia- Extreme, disabling and irrational fear of something that really poses little or no actual danger; the fear leads to avoidance of objects or situations and can cause people to limit their lives.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder- Chronic, exaggerated worry about everyday routine life events and activities, lasting at least six months; almost always anticipating the worst even though there is little reason to expect it. Accompanied by physical symptoms, such as fatigue, trembling, muscle tension, headache, or nausea.

What Are the Treatments for Anxiety Disorders?

Treatments have been largely developed through research conducted by research institutions. They are extremely effective and often combine medication or specific types of psychotherapy.

More medications are available than ever before to effectively treat anxiety disorders. These include antidepressants or benzodiazepines. If one medication is not effective, others can be tried.

The two most effective form of psychotherapy used to treat anxiety disorders is cognitive-behavioral therapy. Cognitive-behavioral therapy teaches patients to understand their thinking patterns so they can react differently to the situations that cause them anxiety.

Is it Possible for Anxiety Disorders to Coexist with Other Physical or Mental Disorders?

It is common for an anxiety disorder to accompany another anxiety disorder, including such illnesses as substance abuse. Anxiety disorders can also coexist with physical disorders. In such instances, these disorders will also need to be treated. Before undergoing any treatment, it is important to have a thorough medical exam to rule out other possible causes.

Adapted from information published by the National Institutes of Mental Health.