



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is the most common mental disorder. [Nineteen percent](#) of adults and 31% of adolescents in the U.S. have an anxiety disorder. Most people develop symptoms before age 21. Women are more likely than men to develop anxiety.

There are many types of anxiety disorders. The most common are:

- **General Anxiety Disorder:** Persistent, excessive, uncontrolled worry and negative thoughts. Some worry is about actual events, while other times the worst is expected for no apparent reason.
- **Panic Disorder:** A sudden, intense fear that produces powerful physical symptoms that last a few minutes. Panic attacks can be caused by a specific trigger or come on unexpectedly.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder:** Intense fear of social or performance situations that is rooted in significant worry about being negatively judged or embarrassed by others.
- **Separation Anxiety Disorder:** Fear of being separated from a person someone feels attached to, often caused by excessive worry that something bad will happen to their loved one while separated and they will be left alone.
- **Phobia Disorder:** An intense, irrational, out of proportion fear of the potential danger of a specific object or situation.

People with anxiety can also have other mental health disorders such as depression or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). If left untreated, anxiety and related conditions can lead to self-medicating with drugs, alcohol, eating disorders or in severe cases, suicide. However, with proper treatment, people with an anxiety disorder can function socially, have full and meaningful lives, and be gainfully employed.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Stress is a normal part of our daily lives, and anxiety is our body's normal "fight or flight" response to that stress. It is considered an anxiety disorder when this reaction is uncontrollable, too severe or unnecessary, interferes with daily activities and social interactions, does not go away or occurs frequently even after the stress subsides. Symptoms of anxiety disorders can include:

- Feeling dread, nervous, irritable, restless, fidgety or on edge.
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom.
- Feeling out of control.
- Anticipating the worst.
- Worrying excessively about the future.
- Increased heart rate, chest pain, breathing rapidly or shortness of breath, sweating, tingling, trembling, nausea or feeling dizzy.
- Feeling weak or tired.
- Racing thoughts.
- Muscle tension.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Headaches, stomach aches, frequent urination or diarrhea.
- Fear of social situations, leaving home or being separated from a loved one.





- Extreme fear about a specific object or situation.
- Refusing to be away from loved ones.
- Anger or explosive outbursts.

RISK FACTORS

Many factors contribute to a person developing an anxiety disorder. People with immediate family members that have an anxiety disorder are at an increased risk for having anxiety themselves. A chemical imbalance in the brain or certain health conditions like thyroid problems, irregular heartbeat or pregnancy can also cause anxiety. Caffeine and some types of medications can cause or heighten anxiety symptoms in some people. Shyness can also contribute.

Additionally, anxiety can be the emotional result from exposure to stressful, traumatic or negative life experiences such as abuse, the death of a loved one, poverty or violence. People who face persistent discrimination or harassment, such as the LGBTQ+ community, communities of color, or people with disabilities, are at a greater risk for developing anxiety.

Environmental factors also can contribute to increased anxiety. The ongoing stress, financial and physical insecurity, grief, and uncertainty about the ending of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many people to develop an anxiety disorder. These issues have also created treatment and support obstacles for those with existing anxiety.

STIGMA VERSUS REALITY

People with anxiety disorders are often seen as weak or not taken seriously. They are criticized for not being able to deal with everyday stressors. Their fears and worries are often invalidated as just being “all in their head” or that their anxiety is avoidable. People with anxiety are often mislabeled as stressed out, shy, clingy, antisocial, socially awkward, or dismissed as a “nervous Nelly.” They are often made to feel embarrassed or ashamed, which in turn can heighten anxiety—particularly social anxiety—and lead to low self-esteem.

Anxiety is more than being “stressed out” or shy. It is a serious medical condition, not a weakness in a person’s personality. People with anxiety disorder often know when they are overacting to or uncomfortable with a situation, yet they are unable to control their worrying thoughts or fears or “get over it” even though they want to. While people with anxiety often feel out of control, anxiety disorders are highly manageable. Leading a healthy lifestyle, having a strong support system, and learning healthy coping strategies can help maintain overall good mental health and help manage anxiety.

LEARN MORE

- [Anxiety Disorders in Children](#) (ADAA)
- [Understanding Anxiety – Caregivers](#) [Get the Facts](#) (SAMHSA)
- [Myth vs Reality](#) (ADAA)

