

## Anxiety & Panic Disorders

*The symptoms of an anxiety or panic disorder can vary from person to person and not all symptoms will be exhibited. Some of the general symptoms include:*

- Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness
- Uncontrollable, obsessive thoughts
- Repeated thoughts or flashbacks of traumatic experiences
- Nightmares, problems sleeping
- Ritualistic behaviors, such as repeated hand washing
- Cold or sweaty hands and/or feet
- Shortness of breath, palpitations, dry mouth, nausea, and dizziness
- An inability to be still and calm
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- Muscle tension

*Anxiety disorders affect approximately 19 million adults in the United States. The majority of the anxiety disorders begin during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. The disorder occurs more often in women than in men, and is equally distributed between whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics*



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### For More Information:

For additional information on anxiety visit the WebMD website [www.WebMD.com](http://www.WebMD.com)

The information obtained for this document was found on the WebMD website.



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*Information for Families and Other Supporters*

For Services, Please Call:

**850-689-7844 or 850-226-8585**

# ANXIETY & PANIC DISORDERS

## *Anxiety Disorders*

There are many different types of anxiety disorders including panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, social anxiety disorder, specific phobias, and generalized anxiety disorder.

Anxiety is a normal human emotion and everyone will experience it at some point in their life. Many people feel anxious or nervous when they are faced with problems at work, before taking a test, or before making important decisions. Anxiety disorders are different and can cause such distress that it interferes with a person's ability to lead a normal life.

## *Types of Anxiety Disorders*

*Panic Disorder*—feelings of terror that strike suddenly and repeatedly with no warning. Symptoms include sweating, chest pain, palpitations (irregular heartbeats), and a feeling of choking. The person may feel like they are having a heart attack or “going crazy”

*Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD)*- constant thoughts or fears that cause them to perform certain rituals or routines, the thoughts are called obsessions and the rituals are called compulsions. An example is someone who has an unreasonable fear of germs who constantly washes their hands.

*Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* - can follow a traumatic and/or terrifying event such as a sexual or physical assault, the unexpected death of a loved one, or a natural disaster. People with PTSD can have lasting and frightening thoughts and memories of the event and tend to be emotionally numb.

*Social Anxiety Disorder*—called a social phobia, social anxiety disorders involve the overwhelming worry and self-consciousness about everyday social situations. Worry centers on a fear of being judged by others, or behaving in a way that might cause embarrassment or lead to ridicule.

*Specific Phobias*—an intense fear of a specific object or situation such as a fear of snakes, flying, heights, etc. The level of fear usually is inappropriate to the situation and may cause the person to avoid common, everyday situations.

*Generalized Anxiety Disorder*—involves excessive, unrealistic worry and tension, even if there is little or nothing to provoke the anxiety.

## *Causes of Anxiety Disorders*

The exact cause of anxiety disorders is unknown and are not the result of personal weakness, or a character flaw. Research on mental illness is finding that these disorders are caused by a combination of factors such as changes in the brain and environmental stress.

Studies have shown that severe or long-lasting stress can change the balance of chemicals in the brain that control mood, the disorders can run in families, and can be inherited from one or both parents. Environmental factors such as trauma or significant events may trigger an anxiety disorder in people who have inherited susceptibility to developing the disorder.

## *How are Anxiety Disorders Diagnosed*

The doctor will begin by asking you questions about your medical history and performing a physical exam. There are no laboratory tests to specifically diagnose anxiety disorders and the doctor may use various tests to look for physical illness as the cause of the symptoms.

You may be referred to a psychiatrist or psychologist, or mental health professionals who are trained to diagnose and treat mental illness.

The doctor may base their diagnosis on the patient's report of the intensity and duration of symptoms that also include problems with daily functioning caused by the symptoms, as well as the doctor's observation of the patient's attitude and behavior.

## *Treatment for Anxiety Disorders*

The exact treatment approach depends on the type of disorder, and one or more of the following therapies may be used to treat most anxiety disorders. Medication may be used to reduce the symptoms including antidepressants and anxiety-reducing drugs. Psychotherapy (a type of counseling) may be used to address the emotional response to mental illness, cognitive-behavioral therapy may be used to recognize and change thought patterns and behaviors that lead to troublesome feelings, dietary and lifestyle changes may be explored, and relaxation therapy may be tried to relieve anxiety and stress.

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