

types of anxiety disorders

Feeling anxious is very much a part of being a human. While everyone feels anxious from time to time, it can sometimes be a problem when the anxiety is causing a lot of distress or when it interferes with our ability to live our lives. When anxiety becomes a problem, it may be considered a disorder. Around 25% of people will meet the criteria to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime. There are different types of anxiety disorders, the most common of which are described below.



Specific phobia

Specific phobia is an intense and distressing fear of an object, animal, situation, or experience. This fear or anxiety can be quite debilitating and may cause us to avoid certain tasks or activities, to the point that we neglect important matters at work, in social activities, in relationships, or our physical health. Some common phobias include animals, heights, needles, and blood. Although there may be some danger posed by some of these objects, animals, or situations, the anxiety experienced in a phobia is always out of proportion to the actual threat. For example, imagining or looking at images of the thing someone is afraid of may be enough to cause anxiety or fear. Someone with a specific phobia may try to avoid the thing they are afraid of.

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is used to describe feelings of anxiety and fear that occur in response to social situations. Someone with social anxiety may be very concerned about what other people may think of them. Even the most confident of people can get a little anxious before a presentation, or when they're meeting new people. For people with social anxiety disorder, this distress can be so overwhelming that it feels as though it is difficult to cope. Often, overwhelming anxiety is experienced when just thinking about the situation or remembering an earlier event. Perhaps the person feels highly anxious and distressed only in some specific situations, such as presenting to a group of people, or perhaps they feel this anxiety across most situations that generally involve other people. Someone with social anxiety may try to avoid social situations altogether. If they can't avoid the situation, they

may use other strategies to prepare, like rehearsing what they will say or bringing someone with them, because the person may feel like they cannot cope otherwise.



You can find more information and resources at the following link:

cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Social-Anxiety

Generalised Anxiety/Worry

Generalised anxiety is a form of anxiety that may also be called worry. Worry is generally regarded as thinking repeatedly about future events. Worry can be about a range of situations, like work, school, friendships, relationships, money, and health. It can be triggered by a variety of external events, or from thoughts that just pop into your head. Worry is often characterised by a lot of "what if" statements such as: "What if I fail my exam?" "What if I can't do the job?" and "What if I get anxious during my interview?". While many people might experience worry, it is okay when it is relatively short-lived and leads to positive problem-solving behaviour. Worry becomes unhelpful when it is frequent and is difficult to control or dismiss. People often think worry is useful, that it helps with problem solving and planning, or prevents future negative outcomes. However, this is not the case, as worry generates more anxiety and more worry, which actually gets in the way of positive thinking and action.

You can find more information and resources at the following link:

cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Worry-and-Rumination

Panic disorder and agoraphobia

Panic disorder is used to describe the condition where panic attacks seem to happen unexpectedly rather than always in predictable situations. It is normal to feel some physical sensations when you're feeling anxious. However, a panic attack is much more intense. It

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includes a range of physical symptoms and anxious thoughts, and peaks within about 10 minutes. A panic attack can be very frightening, and the person may feel a strong desire to escape the situation or to seek emergency assistance. Someone with panic disorder will often have a persistent fear of having another attack or worries about the consequences of the attack. Many people change their behaviour to try to prevent panic attacks. Some people are affected so much that they try to avoid any place where it might be difficult to get help or to escape from. When this avoidance is severe it is called agoraphobia.



You can find more information and resources at the following link:

cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Panic

Health Anxiety

Health anxiety refers to the experience of thinking that there may be a threat to one's health, which triggers an anxious response. While we may think and worry about any number of health-related problems, some of the more common health-related fears include having or developing cancer, Alzheimer's Disease, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, a mental illness such as schizophrenia, a thyroid disorder, or that they may have a heart attack. Not everyone thinks about specific problems, though. Some fears may be more general, in that they simply think that something is "not right". Health anxiety can become a problem when the fears are excessive, out of proportion, and persistent. This anxiety can also become a problem if it leads to unhelpful behaviours, such as excessive checking, reassurance seeking (e.g., from doctors, family, or friends), or avoidance (e.g., of check-ups, doctors, or health-related information). Whether or not someone has real symptoms or an actual medical condition is not the main issue when it comes to health anxiety – the issue is how they are responding to and coping with the symptoms or condition.

You can find more information and resources at the following link:

cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is considered to be separate to anxiety disorders, but is associated with significant anxiety. OCD occurs when a person has repetitive or recurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or behaviours that they feel the urge to repeat over and over (compulsions). Obsessions are repeated thoughts, urges, or mental images that cause the person significant anxiety. Common obsessions include fear of germs or contamination, harm to the self or others, and unwanted 'taboo' thoughts (e.g., involving sex or religion). Compulsions are repetitive behaviours that the person does in response to obsessions. Common compulsions include excessive cleaning and/or washing, repeatedly checking things (such as checking switches or locks), or performing mental rituals (e.g., repeating a significant word or phrase). For someone with OCD, these obsessions and/or compulsions cause a lot of distress and significantly interfere with their every day life.



Other problems

While the above are defined anxiety disorders, anxiety may also be a feature of many other problems such as stress, post traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, eating disorders, and depression to name just a few. If you are experiencing anxiety, it is important to speak to your doctor or a mental health professional so that you can get an accurate diagnosis and support.

What can be done about anxiety?

Effective treatments are available for anxiety disorders. This is important because anxiety disorders don't tend to go away by themselves, and their impact on our lives usually increases over time. If you think you might have problematic anxiety, see your doctor to start the process of getting help.