

MENTAL HEALTH

ANXIETY DISORDERS



TUFTS
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WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety disorders are characterized by worry, physical sensations such as a racing heart, sweating palms and shortness of breath, and efforts to avoid people or situations that might increase feelings of anxiety.

Anxiety can take many forms, and people with anxiety may have a combination of different symptoms.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) often expect the worst, even when there is no apparent reason for concern. Their worry isn't limited to a specific fear or concern. Instead, they often feel they worry about "everything." They find that their worry is hard to control and it occurs on more days than not, for at least six months.

Common symptoms of GAD include:

- ▶ Excessive, uncontrollable, pervasive worry
- ▶ Feeling keyed up or on edge
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating
- ▶ Being easily startled
- ▶ Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, causing chronic fatigue

Panic Disorder

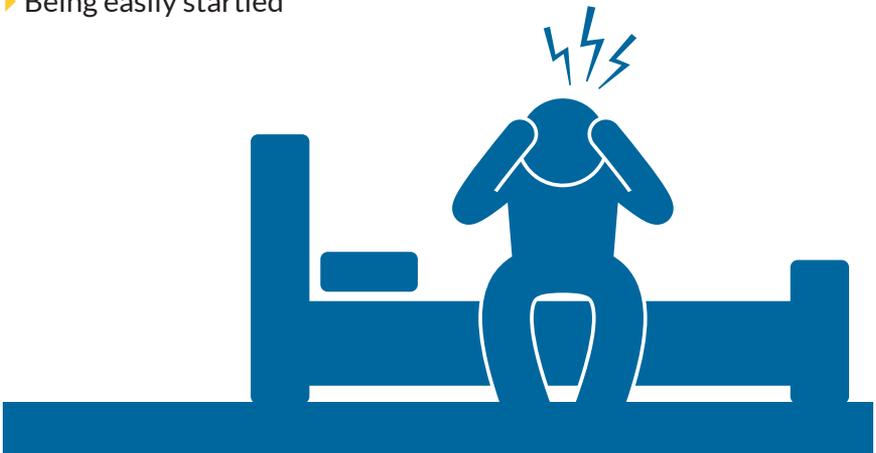
Panic disorder involves episodes of intense anxiety that may seem to come out of the blue. During a panic attack, your heart may pound and you may experience shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea, and flushing. Symptoms develop abruptly and reach a peak within 10 minutes.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

After people experience an extremely stressful, life-threatening event, they often experience disturbing symptoms. For many people, these symptoms will decrease over time, but for some they will not. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be diagnosed if these symptoms last for more than a month and continue to interfere with a person's life.

Symptoms of PTSD can include:

- ▶ Flashbacks or reliving the traumatic event for minutes or even days at a time
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating and irritability
- ▶ Upsetting dreams about the traumatic event
- ▶ Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
- ▶ Feeling emotionally numb and distant from other people
- ▶ Being easily startled



Social Anxiety

People with social anxiety have persistent fear related to social or performance situations. If you have social anxiety, you may dread social situations or try to avoid them altogether. Social anxiety can disrupt your daily routine, work, school, or other activities.

Physical symptoms of social anxiety include:

- ▶ Profuse sweating
- ▶ Trembling or shaking
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Racing heart or palpitations
- ▶ Cold, clammy hands

Specific Phobias

Phobias are anxieties related to specific situations. Examples of phobias are a fear of enclosed spaces (claustrophobia), a fear of heights (acrophobia), or a fear of flying (pterygophobia).

Symptoms of a specific phobia can include:

- ▶ Persistent, irrational fear of a specific object, activity or situation, and an immediate response of uncontrollable anxiety when exposed to the object of fear
- ▶ Sweating, rapid heartbeat, and difficulty breathing when facing the object of the phobia
- ▶ An altered ability to function at normal tasks as a result of the fear

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Physical Examination

Treatment for anxiety should include a physical evaluation from your primary care physician. The exam can determine if there are physical causes for the anxiety. Medical issues that can cause symptoms of anxiety include an ulcer, asthma, or an overactive thyroid, as well as the overuse of caffeine, diet pills, or decongestants.

MORE ABOUT TREATMENT >>>



TREATMENT OPTIONS

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is one of several types of therapy used for anxiety. It focuses on helping a person learn new ways of responding, both mentally and behaviorally, to stressful events and situations. CBT is a time-limited, problem-focused treatment.

One technique used by CBT therapists to treat anxiety is exposure therapy. In this type of treatment, the individual is gradually exposed to his or her feared object or situation in a controlled environment. This approach is considered one of the most effective treatments of specific phobias and has also been successfully adapted to treat social anxiety disorder and panic disorder.

CBT or other talk therapies can be offered one-to-one with an individual therapist or in a group setting with other people who are experiencing similar symptoms.

Medication

Medication combined with therapy is a common and effective treatment approach for the treatment of anxiety. Medication must be prescribed by a physician or a nurse practitioner.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

National Institute of Mental Health

1-866-615-6464 | nimh.nih.gov

This organization provides information about the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health issues. Brochures, information sheets, and other educational information are available.

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

1-240-485-1001 | adaa.org

This national organization works with clinicians, researchers, and consumers. It offers information, a newsletter, handbooks and DVDs, and self-tests.

National Mental Health Information Center

1-800-789-2647 | samhsa.gov

A part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the center's Web site offers information and publications on a range of mental health issues, including a call center and a crisis line.



For more information and help finding a therapist, Tufts Health Plan members can contact the Tufts Health Plan Mental Health Department at 1-800-208-9565. Members can also access information or search for a provider online at tuftshealthplan.com.

Mental Health Department

1-800-208-9565

tuftshealthplan.com



705 Mount Auburn Street
Watertown, MA 02472