

Anxiety

- ⇒ Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or **18.1%** of the population every year
- ⇒ Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet only 36.9% of those suffering receive treatment.
- ⇒ According to the National Institutes of Health, nearly 1 in 3 of all adolescents ages 13 to 18 will experience an anxiety disorder

Overview

Occasional anxiety is an expected part of life. You might feel anxious when faced with a problem at work, before taking a test, or before making an important decision. But anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The symptoms can interfere with daily activities such as schoolwork, sports, extra-curriculars, relationships, and job performance.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, including but not limited to generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder.

Signs and Symptoms

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) display excessive anxiety or worry, most days for at least 6 months, about a number of things such as school, friendships, personal health, work, and everyday routine life circumstances.

Generalized anxiety disorder symptoms include:

- *Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge*
- *Being easily fatigued*
- *Having difficulty concentrating; mind going blank*
- *Being irritable*
- *Having muscle tension*
- *Difficulty controlling feelings of worry*
- *Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, restlessness, or unsatisfying sleep*

Panic Disorder

People with panic disorder have recurrent unexpected panic attacks. Panic attacks are sudden periods of intense fear that come on quickly and reach their peak within minutes. Attacks can occur unexpectedly or can be brought on by a trigger, such as a feared object or situation.

During a panic attack, people may experience:

- *Heart palpitations, a pounding heartbeat, or an accelerated heart rate*
- *Sweating*
- *Trembling or shaking*
- *Sensations of shortness of breath, smothering, or choking*
- *Feelings of impending doom*
- *Feelings of being out of control*

People with panic disorder often worry about when the next attack will happen and actively try to prevent future attacks by avoiding places, situations, or behaviors they associate with panic attacks. Worry about panic attacks, and the effort spent trying to avoid attacks, cause significant problems in various areas of the person's life.

Risk Factors

Researchers are finding that both genetic and environmental factors contribute to the risk of developing an anxiety disorder. Although the risk factors for each type of anxiety disorder can vary, some general risk factors for all types of anxiety disorders include:

- *Temperamental traits of shyness or behavioral inhibition in childhood*
- *Exposure to stressful and negative life or environmental events in early childhood or adulthood*
- *A history of anxiety or other mental illnesses in biological relatives*
- *Some physical health conditions, such as thyroid problems or heart arrhythmias, or caffeine or other substances/medications, can produce or aggravate anxiety symptoms; a physical health examination is helpful in the evaluation of a possible anxiety disorder.*

Treatments

Anxiety disorders are generally treated with psychotherapy, medication, or both. There are many ways to treat anxiety and people should work with their mental health professionals to choose the treatment that is best for them.

How Do I Get Help?

If you are experiencing anxiety, contact a mental health professional to discuss options. Additionally, here are some things you can do right now:

5 senses exercise:

- 5: Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you. ...
- 4: Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you. ...
- 3: Acknowledge THREE things you hear. ...
- 2: Acknowledge TWO things you can smell. ...
- 1: Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste.

Breathing Exercise:

1. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Keep your shoulders relaxed. ...
2. Exhale slowly through your mouth. As you blow **air** out, purse your lips slightly, but keep your jaw relaxed. ...
3. Repeat this breathing exercise.

Difference between Stress and Anxiety

There's a fine line between stress and anxiety. Both are emotional responses, but stress is typically caused by an external trigger. The trigger can be short-term, such as a work deadline or a fight with a loved one or long-term, such as poverty, discrimination and chronic illness. People under stress experience mental and physical symptoms, such as irritability, anger, fatigue, muscle pain, digestive troubles and difficulty sleeping.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is defined by persistent, excessive worries that don't go away even in the absence of a stressor. Anxiety leads to a nearly identical set of symptoms as stress: insomnia, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, muscle tension and irritability.

Listen to your body to change your emotions

Fear has a physical response — rapid heart rate, quicker breaths and other physiological responses. Stressful situations produce these physical responses, which your mind interprets as, "You are afraid."

When you physically feel fear, take a moment to listen to your body and gain back control. Are you breathing quickly or hard? Take a few deep breaths and slow your breathing.

Controlling your physical response to fear can influence your emotional response.

Get past your own thoughts

Fear is largely caused by your thoughts. Your body gives you a fear message and your mind runs with it, giving you all kinds of irrational reasons you should be scared.

How you think about a circumstance impacts how you feel about it. Approaching your fear rationally, realistically and changing how you think will help you overcome your strong emotion.

This can be challenging to accomplish without professional guidance, so if needed, see a licensed mental health professional with expertise in anxiety management.

Need help getting connected to a professional? Email counseling@breakdownstl.org for assistance.

Sources:

* National Institute of Mental Health - <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

* National Institutes of Health - <https://www.nih.gov>

* Mayo Clinic - <https://www.mayoclinic.org>

* American Psychological Association- <https://www.apa.org>