



Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are more than just “nerves.” They are characterized by feelings of panic, fear, and discomfort that arise with no clear cause, in situations that are not usually stressful or dangerous. In many cases, anxiety disorders arise for no obvious reason and often without warning. The feelings of anxiety can happen over and over again, unless treatment is received.

More than 19 million American adults live with anxiety disorders. The major types of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, phobias and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If left untreated, an anxiety disorder can make everyday life miserable.

Major Types of Anxiety Disorders

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** is usually the diagnosis if you experience six months or more of continual, extreme worry and tension that is not based on real concerns. Subjects include health, loved ones, finances, and jobs. Sometimes, the “worry” is nameless, taking the form of a constant feeling of dread.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** is marked by obsessions – repeated, upsetting thoughts and images – that you cannot control by yourself. To combat these images and thoughts and ease anxiety, a person with OCD spends time in repetitive rituals (compulsions), such as hand washing, checking and re-checking, and following rigid procedures.
- **Panic Disorder** is most often characterized by the presence of panic attacks, which are feelings and symptoms such as a pounding heart, chest pain, sweating, trembling, shortness of breath, numbness and fear of dying. Panic attacks happen fast, appear out of the blue and take place over and over again. There is usually no logical or visible cause for these attacks.
- **Phobias** are deep-seated fears that are extreme, irrational and upsetting to a person’s life. A person may experience a phobia to a specific object or situation that isn’t usually harmful – such as claustrophobia (fear of confined spaces), and acrophobia (fear of heights). Social phobia is fear of being watched, embarrassed or humiliated while doing something in

public, such as public speaking, eating, or writing. Agoraphobia is the fear of places or situations from which escape might be hard, like being in a crowd.

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is the long-term, severe and continuing reaction a person may experience following a disaster (such as a fire or earthquake) or a very traumatic experience (war, rape, or sexual abuse). PTSD often occurs in people after they have experienced or witnessed one or more acts of violence. Symptoms include nightmares, loss of sleep, and flashbacks. PTSD interferes with concentration and the ability to enjoy life.

Getting Help

To find help or get more information about anxiety disorders, start with your student health center or counseling service on campus, or a local Mental Health Association. Anxiety disorders are treatable; with help, you can recover. In addition, here are other resources that can provide information and support.

- National Mental Health Association: www.nmha.org;
www.mpoweryouth.org; 800-969-NMHA (6642)
- Anxiety Disorders Association of America: www.adaa.org
- Freedom From Fear: www.freedomfromfear.org
- The Anxiety-Panic Internet Resource: www.algy.com/anxiety/index.shtml
- Anxiety/Panic Attack Resource Site: www.anxietypanic.com
- National Anxiety Foundation: <http://lexington-on-line.com/naf.html>
- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov
- Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation: www.ocfoundation.org