



Anxiety Disorders And Depression

Anxiety disorders and depression are the two most common mental illnesses experienced by Americans. Approximately half of all people who suffer from anxiety disorders also suffer from depression.

The Basics

- Anxiety disorders are real. 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. If left untreated, an anxiety disorder can make everyday life miserable.
- Anxiety disorders are common. More than 19 million American adults live with anxiety disorders, which include generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), phobias (including social phobia), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and panic disorder.
- Anxiety disorders can interfere with having a full, productive life. People with anxiety disorders may experience extreme responses to non-threatening situations, and these reactions can create lives filled with chronic anxiety, terror or discomfort. However, with therapy and/or medication, people can have full and productive lives.
- Anxiety disorders are linked to depression. The life-changing impact of anxiety disorders may trigger depression – and it’s also true that depression may generate anxiety disorders. Two out of three people with depression also have symptoms of anxiety. About 80 percent of depressed individuals suffer psychological anxiety symptoms: unrealistic apprehension, fears, worry, agitation, irritability, or panic attacks. Some 60 percent of people with depression have anxiety-related physical symptoms: headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic fatigue, and chronic pain, among others. Approximately 65 percent of those with depression experience sleep disturbances, about 20 percent feel agitated, 25 percent have phobia, approximately 17 percent report generalized anxiety symptoms and 10 percent suffer panic attacks.
- Anxiety disorders are very treatable. Like depression, the most common and successful ways to treat anxiety disorders, are antidepressant medication, psychotherapy or a combination of the two.

The Major 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

Begin your search for help with your student health center or counseling service on campus. There are also other resources that can provide information and support.

- National Mental Health Association: www.nmha.org
- Anxiety Disorders Association of America: www.adaa.org
- The Anxiety-Panic Internet Resource: www.algy.com/anxiety/index.shtml
- Panic Anxiety Education Management Services: www.paems.com.au/index.html
- Anxiety/Panic Attack Resource Site: www.anxietypanic.com
- Freedom From Fear: www.freedomfromfear.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

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