**What is anxiety?**

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), around 40 million people in the United States have an anxiety disorder. It is the most common group of mental illnesses in the country. However, only 36.9% of people with an anxiety disorder receive treatment.

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines anxiety as “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”

Knowing the difference between typical feelings of anxiety and an anxiety disorder requiring medical attention can help a person identify and treat the condition.

**Anxiety and anxiety disorders:**

Anxiety is a complex response to real or perceived threats. It can involve. Trusted Source cognitive, physical, and behavioral changes.

Real or perceived danger causes a rush of adrenaline, a hormone and chemical messenger in the brain, which in turn triggers these anxiety reactions in a process called the fight-or-flight response. Some people may experience this response in difficult social situations or around important events or decisions.

The duration or severity of feelings of anxiety can sometimes be out of proportion to the original trigger or stressor. Physical symptoms, such as increased blood pressure and nausea, may also develop. These responses move beyond anxiety into an anxiety disorder.

Once anxiety reaches the stage of a disorder, it can interfere Trusted Source with daily function.



**Symptoms:**

There are several different anxiety disorders, which can present with different symptoms. Typical symptoms of anxious feelings include the following Trusted Source:

Restlessness

Uncontrollable feelings of worry

Increased irritability

Difficulty concentrating

Sleep difficulties

While many people will occasionally experience these symptoms in daily life, people with general anxiety disorder (GAD) will experience them at persistent or extreme levels.

**Types:**

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders: 5th Edition, text revision (DSM-5-TR) classifies anxiety disorders into several main types.

In previous editions of the DSM-5-TR, anxiety disorders included obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as acute stress disorder. However, the manual no longer groups Trusted Source these mental health difficulties under anxiety.

**Anxiety disorders now include the following:**

 **GAD**

This chronic disorder involves excessive, long lasting anxiety and worries about nonspecific life events, objects, and situations. GAD is the most common anxiety disorder, and people with it are not always able to identify the cause of their anxiety.

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is persistent and excessive worry or nervousness about everyday life that often interferes with daily activities and personal relationships. Treatments may include psychotherapy, medication, and lifestyle changes.

GAD, a type of anxiety disorder, is very common. It affects 3.1% of the population (or 6.8 million adults) in the United States in any given year. It is more common in women.

Living with anxiety can be challenging. However, as with other anxiety disorders, GAD is highly treatable.

This article provides an overview of GAD, including its symptoms and causes. It also lists some potential treatment options.

 **Symptoms:**

Doctors diagnose GAD when a person experiences anxiety for 6 months or more.

However, physical symptoms of the disorder can vary Trusted Source between cases. Symptoms may improve or worsen at different times. For example, periods of high stress or physical illness often cause symptoms to exacerbate for a while.

Emotional and cognitive symptoms of GAD include:

Uncontrollable and persistent worries, fears, and concerns An inability to deal with uncertainty about the future intrusive thoughts excessive planning and troubleshooting difficulty making decisions fear of making the “wrong” decision problems concentrating an inability to relax Physical symptoms include: tense or tight muscles aches and pains difficulty sleeping fatigue feeling restless, jumpy, or twitchy heart palpitations digestive issues, such as nausea or diarrhea being easily startled excessive sweating frequent urination Behavioral symptoms include:

Being unable to relax or spend “quiet” time alone switching between tasks or not finishing tasks due to finding it difficult to concentrate spending excessive amounts of time completing simple tasks redoing tasks because they are not “perfect” avoiding situations that trigger anxiety, including socializing with others and speaking in public missing school or work due to fatigue, fear, or other symptoms requiring reassurance and approval from others It is important to note that children and adolescents may display Trusted Source tightening irritability and anger when experiencing depression or anxiety.

Learn more about the cognitive, physical, and behavioral effects of anxiety.

**Co-occurring conditions**

People with GAD often have co-occurring conditions. These may include:

Other anxiety disorders, such as phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or social anxiety depression drug or alcohol misuse

 **Panic disorder**

Brief or sudden attacks of intense terror and apprehension characterize panic disorder. These attacks can lead to shaking, confusion, dizziness, nausea, and breathing difficulties. Panic attacks tend to occur and escalate rapidly. Panic disorders usually occur after frightening experiences or prolonged stress but may also occur without a trigger.

 **Symptoms:**

A panic attack may be an isolated issue or a reoccurring symptom of panic disorder. Regardless, an attack can be frightening, upsetting, and uncomfortable. The feelings are more intense than those of stress that people usually experience.

Panic attacks typically last 5–20 minutes, but the symptoms can linger for up to 1 hour.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, a panic attack involves at least four of the following symptoms:

chest pain and discomfort chills or feeling hot dizziness and lightheadedness a fear of dying a fear of losing control or “going crazy” heart palpitations, an irregular heartbeat, or a rapid heart rate numbness or tingling shaking, sweating, or trembling trouble breathing, which may feel like choking feeling detached from reality nausea and an upset stomach.

People with panic attacks sometimes develop agoraphobia, which involves a fear of situations where help or an escape may be difficult to access.

The symptoms of a panic attack can resemble those of other medical conditions, including lung disorders, heart conditions, or thyroid problems.

Sometimes, a person having a panic attack seeks emergency medical care because they feel as if they are having a heart attack.

 **Specific phobia**

This is a fear and avoidance of a particular object or situation. Phobias are not like other anxiety disorders, as they relate to a specific cause Trusted Source.

A person with a phobia might acknowledge fear as illogical or extreme but remain unable to control feelings of anxiety around the trigger. Triggers for a phobia range from situations and animals to everyday objects.

 **Agoraphobia**

This is a fear and avoidance of places, events, or situations from which it may be difficult to escape or where help would not be available in emergencies. People often misunderstand this condition as a phobia of open spaces and the outdoors. A person with agoraphobia may fear leaving home or using elevators and public transport.

 **Selective mutism**

Some children experience this form of anxiety, in which they cannot speak in certain places or contexts, even though they may have excellent verbal communication skills around familiar people.

 **Social anxiety disorder**

This is a fear of adverse judgment from others in social situations or of public embarrassment. Social anxiety disorder includes a range of feelings Trusted Source, such as stage fright, a fear of intimacy, and anxiety around humiliation and rejection.

 **Separation anxiety disorder**

High anxiety levels after separation from a person or place that provides feelings of security or safety characterize separation anxiety disorder. Separation anxiety is most common Trusted Source in young children but can affect people of all ages.

 **Causes**

The causes of anxiety disorders are complicated. Many might occur at once, some may lead to others, and some might not lead to an anxiety disorder unless another is present.

**Possible causes include:**

Environmental stressors, such as relationship problems or family issues, genetics, medical factors, such as disease symptoms or the effects of a medication substance withdrawal.

**Treatment:**

Treatment often consists Trusted Source of psychotherapy, behavioral therapy, and medication.

Sometimes, alcohol dependence, depression, or other underlying conditions require treatment before treating an anxiety disorder can take place.

**Self-treatment:**

Sometimes, a person can treat an anxiety disorder at home without clinical supervision. However, this may not be effective for severe or long-term anxiety disorders.

There are several exercises and actions to help a person cope with milder, more focused, or shorter-term anxiety disorders, including:

Stress management

Relaxation techniques

Maintaining support networks

Physical exercise

Counseling

A standard way of treating anxiety is psychological counseling. This can include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), psychotherapy, or a combination of therapies.

CBT is a type of psychotherapy that aims to recognize and change harmful thought patterns that form the foundation of anxious and troublesome feelings.

 **Medications:**

A person can support anxiety management with several types Trusted Source of medication.

Medicines that might control some physical and mental symptoms include antidepressants, benzodiazepines, and tricyclic antidepressants.

Benzodiazepines: A doctor may prescribe these for certain people with anxiety, but they can cause addiction. Diazepam, or Valium, is a common benzodiazepine.

Antidepressants: These commonly help with anxiety, even though they also target depression. Serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), fluoxetine, and citalopram are examples.

Tricyclic antidepressants: These are an older class of drugs that benefit most anxiety disorders other than obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Imipramine and clomipramine are two examples of tricyclics.

**Additional drugs a person might use to treat anxiety include:**

Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs)

Beta-blockers Buspirone

Seek medical advice if the adverse effects of any prescribed medications become severe.

 **Prevention:**

There are ways to reduce the risk of anxiety disorders. Remember that anxious feelings are a natural factor of daily life, and experiencing those does not always indicate the presence of a mental health disorder.

People may benefit from the following:

Reducing caffeine intake

Checking with a health professional before using over-the-counter or herbal remedies

Maintaining a balanced, nutritious diet

Keeping a regular sleep pattern

Regularly exercising

Avoiding alcohol, cannabis, and other recreational drugs