



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress or danger, but constant feelings of tension and apprehension may be due to an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders make life difficult. Most anxiety disorders can be treated successfully, usually with a combination of counselling and medicines.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders in Australia. One in four people will experience an anxiety disorder at some time in their life.

Symptoms

Symptoms of anxiety can vary from person to person and may include:

- Feeling irritable, restless or out of control
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- A fear that something bad will happen
- A fast heart beat
- Sweating
- Headache
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- Trembling
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Tense muscles
- Chest pains or tightness
- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- A feeling of choking or a lump in the throat
- Fatigue
- Visual disturbances.

Important

Anxiety symptoms can be affected by:

- Some medical conditions (e.g., heart and thyroid problems)
- Some medicines (e.g., certain blood pressure medicines)
- Some addictive and illicit drugs.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

These symptoms may be part of a normal reaction to stress or danger, but they tend to be worse and last for longer when due to an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorders

There are several different forms of anxiety disorder including:

Generalised anxiety disorder

A generalised anxiety disorder involves excessive, almost constant anxiety and worry about something such as work, money, health, relationships or safety.

Phobias

A phobia is an intense fear of something (e.g., heights, animals, closed spaces, social situations). A person with a phobia will try to avoid what they fear and this behaviour can significantly interfere with their life.

Panic disorder

People with panic disorder have sudden, spontaneous attacks of intense fear and anxiety ('panic attacks') which may or may not be associated with a stressful or threatening situation. A person experiencing a panic attack may feel like they have lost control of their body and emotions.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

People with OCD have continual thoughts and fears (obsessions) that cause anxiety and lead them to continually repeat certain tasks or rituals (compulsions) in order to feel less anxious.

For example, they may worry about cleanliness and need to wash their hands repeatedly, or be concerned that they did not lock a door and have to check it constantly. These tasks can be time consuming and interfere with daily life. People with this condition usually know their behaviour is not sensible, are embarrassed by it and try to hide it.

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a serious psychological reaction that some people develop after an extremely frightening or traumatic experience such as war, abuse, a natural disaster or a major accident. PTSD can develop a long time after the traumatic event is over. Symptoms include intrusive memories, nightmares, numbed feelings, anxiety and/or depression.

Management

Treatment of an anxiety disorder often involves several different strategies including:

- Finding and avoiding triggers
- Counselling and psychological treatments to help a person change their thought patterns and the way they react to certain situations (e.g., cognitive behaviour therapy)
- Breathing and muscle relaxation techniques
- Physical exercise
- Medicines.

Many people with anxiety problems also have depression and need help for both conditions.

Medicines

Prescription medicines for anxiety disorders include:

- Anti-anxiety and sedative medicines
- Antidepressant medicines.

It is important to consult your doctor or pharmacist before:

- Stopping regular medicines for anxiety – as stopping suddenly can make anxiety symptoms worse
- Taking any other medicines (including complementary medicines) in addition to medicines prescribed for anxiety – as they may interfere with each other's actions.

Self care

- Share your anxious thoughts and feelings with someone you trust.
- Learn about your anxiety disorder and how to manage it.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week, to improve general health and wellbeing, sleep and mood.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques to relax your body and mind.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Get adequate sleep and relaxation.
- Eat a healthy, well balanced diet, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Don't smoke. Nicotine may worsen anxiety symptoms.
- Limit alcohol. It may worsen anxiety symptoms
- Limit caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks). It may worsen anxiety symptoms.

Getting help

Help is available for people with anxiety disorders and their families and friends. Doctors, psychologists and counsellors can give professional help and there are community support groups for many types of anxiety disorders.

Related fact cards

- *Alcohol*
- *Depression*
- *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Sleeping Problems*
- *Smoking series*

For more information

A doctor – listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

Beyond Blue – Info Line phone 1300 22 4636 or website www.beyondblue.org.au or youth website www.ybblue.com.au

Kids Helpline – phone 1800 55 1800 or website www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline – phone 13 11 14 (24 hours, Australia-wide) or website www.lifeline.org.au

Mental Health Council of Australia phone (02) 6285 3100 or website www.mhca.org.au

MoodGYM – www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Sane Australia – phone 1800 187 263 or website www.sane.org

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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