



# ANXIETY

A Mental Health Guide

**Silence**  
**the ~~Shame~~**



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# OVERVIEW

Anxiety is your body's natural response to stress. It's a feeling of fear or apprehension about what's to come. Occasional anxiety is an expected part of life. For example, 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 symptoms can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, school work, and relationships.

Anxiety disorders affect 40 million people in the United States. It is the most common group of mental illnesses in the country. However, only 36.9 percent of people with an anxiety disorder receive treatment.

There are several anxiety disorders, including **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**, **Panic Disorder**, and **Phobia-related Disorders**.

## **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

People with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) display excessive anxiety or worry, most days for at least six months, about several things such as personal health, work, social interactions, and everyday routine life circumstances. Fear and anxiety can cause significant problems in areas of their life, such as social interactions, school, and work.

## **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 be brought on by a trigger, such as a feared object or situation.

## **Phobia-Related Disorders**

A phobia is an intense fear of—or aversion to—specific objects or situations. Although it can be realistic to be anxious in some circumstances, the fear people with phobias feel is out of proportion to the actual danger caused by the situation or object.

# SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

People can experience anxiety in different ways. If persistent symptoms present, a doctor might diagnose you with a particular anxiety disorder.

Generalized anxiety disorder symptoms include:

- Excessive and uncontrollable worry
- 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

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 a phobia:

- May have an irrational or excessive worry about encountering the feared object or situation
- Take active steps to avoid the feared object or situation
- Experience immediate, intense anxiety upon interacting with the feared object or situation
- Endure unavoidable things and conditions with severe anxiety



# CAUSES & RISK FACTORS

Everyone's experience of anxiety is different, so it's hard to know exactly what causes anxiety problems. There are several factors involved. 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, e.g., difficulties at work, relationship problems, or family issues
- Genetics, e.g., a family history of anxiety, can increase the likelihood of developing an anxiety disorder
- Medical factors, e.g., the symptoms of a different disease, the effects of a medication, or the stress of an intensive surgery or prolonged recovery
- Brain chemistry, e.g., psychologists define many anxiety disorders as misalignments of hormones and electrical signals in the brain.
- Withdrawal from an illicit substance, the effects of which might intensify the impact of other possible causes

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 kinds 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 and medications, can produce or aggravate anxiety symptoms; a physical health examination is helpful in the evaluation of a possible anxiety disorder.

# TREATMENT

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

## Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy or “talk therapy” can help people with anxiety disorders. However, psychotherapy must be directed at the person’s specific anxieties and tailored to their needs.

## Medication

Medication does not cure anxiety disorders but can help relieve symptoms. Medication for anxiety is prescribed by doctors, such as a psychiatrist or primary care provider. Some states also allow psychologists who have received specialized training to prescribe psychiatric medications. The most common medications to combat anxiety disorders are anti-anxiety drugs (benzodiazepines), antidepressants, and beta-blockers.

## Support Groups

Some people with anxiety disorders might benefit from joining a self-help or support group to connect with others and share experiences. Internet chat rooms might also be helpful, but any advice received over the internet should be used with caution. Internet acquaintances have usually never seen each other, and what has helped one person is not necessarily what is best for another. In addition, you should always check with your doctor before following any treatment advice found on the internet. Talking with a trusted friend or clergy member can also provide support, but it is not necessarily a sufficient alternative to care from a doctor or other health professional.

## Stress Management Techniques

Stress management techniques and meditation can help people with anxiety disorders calm themselves and may enhance the effects of therapy. In addition, research suggests that aerobic exercise can help some people manage their anxiety; however, exercise should not take the place of standard care, and more research is needed.





# MANAGING ANXIETY & WORRY

Chronic worrying is often driven by a need to worry to “make sure things will all be OK.” Unfortunately, it can negatively affect your mood relationships, work productivity, and social life. Everyone has different triggers, and identifying them is one of the essential steps to coping with and managing anxiety attacks. Identifying your triggers can take some time and self-reflection. In the meantime, there are things you can do to try to help calm or quiet your anxiety from taking over.



## TAKE A TIME-OUT & MOVE

Practice yoga, listen to music, meditate, get a massage, or learn relaxation techniques. Stepping back from the problem helps clear your head.

## WRITE DOWN YOUR WORRIES

If an anxious thought or worry comes into your head during the day, make a brief note of it and then continue about your day. Remind yourself that you'll have time to think about it later, so there's no need to worry about it right now.



## CHALLENGE ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

Accept that you cannot control everything. Put your stress in perspective of the real impact of the stressor. Maintain a positive attitude and make an effort to replace negative thoughts.

## PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Acknowledge and observe your worries from an outsider's perspective without reacting or judging. Notice that when you don't try to control the anxious thoughts, they soon pass.



## TALK WITH SOMEONE

Tell friends and family you're feeling overwhelmed, and let them know how they can help you. Then, talk to a physician or therapist for professional help. It is one of the most effective ways to calm your nervous system and diffuse anxiety.

# RESOURCES

## 01 Crisis Text Line

Text SILENCE to 707070 to be connected to a trained Crisis Counselor. The Crisis Text Line provides free, text-based support 24/7.

## 03 Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administrator (SAMHSA)

Call 1-800-662-4357 to access national information about local mental health services and treatment in your community. The federal agency that leads efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation.

## 05 Anxiety & Depression Association of America

Nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, and co-occurring disorders through the alignment of science, treatment, and education.

## 02 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-8255 to access a national network of local crisis centers providing free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7.

## 04 The Trevor Project

Call 1-866-488-7386 to access crisis intervention and suicide prevention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. TrevorText START to 678-678.

## 06 Postpartum Support International

Call 1-800-944-4PPD (4773) to access non-emergency resources and education about the emotional changes that women experience during pregnancy and postpartum.





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**PODCAST**



If you need to connect with someone,  
text "**SILENCE**" to 741741