

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress or danger, but constant feelings of tension or fear may be due to an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders make can life hard. Most anxiety disorders can be well managed. Treatments include counselling and medicines.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health conditions 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 include:

- feeling irritable, restless or out of control.
- problems with thinking or concentration.
- sleeping problems.
- a fear that something bad will happen.
- a fast heart beat.

- sweating.
- headache.
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea.
- trembling or shaking.
- feeling dizzy or lightheaded.
- tense muscles (e.g. sore back, neck or jaw).
- chest pains or tightness.
- rapid breathing, shortness of breath.
- a feeling of choking or a lump in your throat.
- feeling tired.
- problems with eyesight.

These symptoms can 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 almost constant (on most days for at least 6 months) anxiety and worry, usually about real issues 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 interfere with their life.

Panic disorder

People with panic disorder have sudden attacks of intense fear and anxiety ('panic attacks') that may or may not be connected to a stressful situation. A person experiencing a panic attack may feel that they cannot bring the anxiety under control.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

People with OCD have constant 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 reaction that some people develop after seeing or being involved in a very frightening or traumatic event 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 re-living the event through memories and nightmares, numbed feelings, anxiety and depression.

Management

Anxiety disorders can be managed with a number of different treatments including:

- learning about the condition.
- 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).
- relaxation therapy (e.g. slow deep breathing, relaxing muscles).
- physical exercise – can help relieve tension.
- medicines.

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

Medicines

Prescription medicines for anxiety disorders include:

- sedative medicines.
- antidepressant medicines.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist before:

- stopping a regular medicine for anxiety, as stopping suddenly can make anxiety symptoms worse.
- taking non-prescription medicines in addition to prescription medicines, as they may interact (interfere) with each other.

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 health, sleep and mood.
- Learn and use relaxation techniques to relax your body and mind.
- Get plenty of sleep and relaxation.
- Eat a healthy, well balanced diet, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Don't smoke. Nicotine can worsen anxiety symptoms.

Important

Anxiety symptoms can be affected by:

- some medical conditions (e.g. heart and thyroid problems)
- some medicines
- some illegal drugs.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

- Stop drinking alcohol or limit alcohol to no more than two standard drinks per day. It can worsen anxiety symptoms.
- Limit caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks). It can 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.

For more information

Beyond Blue

Info Line phone: 1300 22 4636

Website: www.beyondblue.org.au

Youth website: www.ybblue.com.au

Kids Helpline

Phone: 1800 55 1800

Website: www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline

Phone: 13 11 14 (24 hours crisis support)

Website: www.lifeline.org.au

The MoodGYM cognitive behaviour therapy training program

Website: www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

BlueBoard online support group

Website: www.blueboard.anu.edu.au

Ecouch self help interactive program

Website: www.ecouch.anu.edu.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

NPS Medicine Wise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

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

Related fact cards

- » *Alcohol*
- » *Depression*
- » *Medicines & Driving (electronic only – ask your pharmacist)*
- » *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- » *Relaxation Techniques*
- » *Sleeping Problems*
- » *Smoking*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: