

Brief Overview of Anxiety Disorders

- Anxiety disorders are the most common psychiatric illnesses affecting children and adults.
- Anxiety disorders may develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events.
- Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet only about one-third of those suffering from an anxiety disorder receive treatment.
- [Generalized Anxiety Disorder \(GAD\)](#). Generalized anxiety disorder is characterized by excessive, unrealistic worry that lasts six months or more; in adults, the anxiety may focus on issues such as health, money, or career. In addition to chronic worry, GAD symptoms include trembling, muscular aches, insomnia, abdominal upsets, dizziness, and irritability.
- [Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder \(OCD\)](#). People suffering from OCD are plagued by persistent, recurring thoughts (obsessions) that reflect exaggerated anxiety or fears; typical obsessions include worry about being contaminated or fears of behaving improperly or acting violently. The obsessions may lead to performing a ritual or routine (compulsions), such as washing hands, repeating phrases, or hoarding, to relieve the anxiety caused by the obsession.
- [Panic Disorder](#). People with panic disorder suffer severe attacks of panic, which may make them feel as if they are having a heart attack or can't breathe, for no apparent reason. Symptoms include heart palpitations, chest pain or discomfort, sweating, trembling, tingling sensations, feeling of choking, fear of dying, fear of losing control, and feelings of unreality. Panic disorder often occurs with agoraphobia, in which people are afraid of having a panic attack in a place from which escape would be difficult, so they avoid these places.
- [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\)](#). Posttraumatic stress disorder can follow an exposure to a traumatic event such as a sexual or physical assault, witnessing a death, the unexpected death of a loved one, or natural disaster. Three main symptoms are associated with PTSD: "reliving" of the traumatic event through flashbacks or nightmares; avoidance behaviors (avoiding places related to the trauma) and emotional numbing (detachment from others); and physiological arousal such as difficulty sleeping, irritability, or poor concentration.
- [Social Anxiety Disorder \(Social Phobia\)](#). Social anxiety disorder, or SAD, is also called social phobia. It is characterized by extreme anxiety about being judged by others or behaving in a way that might cause embarrassment or ridicule. This intense anxiety may lead to avoidance behavior. Physical symptoms associated with this disorder include heart palpitations, faintness, blushing, and profuse sweating.
- [Specific phobias](#). People with specific phobias suffer from an intense fear reaction to a specific object or situation (examples: spiders, dogs, heights). The level of fear is usually inappropriate to the situation and it is recognized by the sufferer as being irrational. This inordinate fear can lead to the avoidance of common, everyday situations.

Anxiety disorders are highly treatable with psychosocial therapies, medication, or both.

- Psychosocial treatments used in the treatment of anxiety disorders include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), exposure therapy, anxiety management and relaxation therapies, and psychotherapy.
- Drugs used to treat anxiety disorders include selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), tricyclic antidepressants, benzodiazepines, beta blockers, and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs).
- Combination therapies are often utilized.