

## Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural inborn response to threat of either one safety or self-esteem. Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. While stress and anxious feelings are a common response to a situation where we feel under pressure, they usually pass once the stressful situation has passed, or 'stressor' is removed. Everyone has a level of anxiety, and it is necessary. It is part of the normal human experience.

Anxiety is when these anxious feelings don't subside – pathological anxiety is anxiety with the absence of threat, symptoms persist without any particular reason or cause. It's a serious condition that makes it hard to cope with daily life. Everyone feels anxious from time to time, but for someone experiencing anxiety, these feelings can't be easily controlled.

For **six months** or more, on more days than not, have you:

- Felt very worried about a number of events or activities
- Found it hard to stop worrying
- Found that your anxiety made it difficult for you to do everyday activities (e.g. work, study, seeing friends and family)?
- Felt restless or on edge
- Felt easily tired
- Had difficulty concentrating
- Felt irritable
- Had muscle tension (e.g. sore jaw or back)
- Had trouble sleeping (e.g. difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless sleep)?

**It depends on the type of anxiety disorder, but general symptoms include:**

- Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness
- Problems sleeping
- Cold or sweaty hands or feet
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Not being able to be still and calm
- Dry mouth
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- Nausea
- Muscle tension
- Dizziness
- Tightness of chest

There are different types of anxiety and they need to be diagnosed by well-trained professionals who specialise in anxiety types:

- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Phobic specific anxiety
- Social phobia
- Panic disorders
- Anxiety conditions specific to children
- Separation anxiety disorder

A level of anxiety is normal and can be related to the normal everyday circumstances of our life learning how to overcome and cope with normal anxiety and fear is part of our maturing or emotional development some of us will need help from professionals in order to develop the coping skills to deal with specific anxieties.

### **What Are the Causes of Anxiety Disorders?**

The exact cause of anxiety disorders is unknown, but anxiety disorders -- like other forms of mental illness -- are not the result of personal weakness, a character flaw, or poor upbringing. As scientists continue their research on mental illness, it is becoming clear that many of these disorders are caused by a combination of factors, including changes in the brain and environmental stress.

Like other brain illnesses, anxiety disorders may be caused by problems in the functioning of brain circuits that regulate fear and other emotions. Studies have shown that severe or long-lasting stress can change the way nerve cells within these circuits transmit information from one region of the brain to another. Other studies have shown that people with certain anxiety disorders have changes in certain brain structures that control memories linked with strong emotions. In addition, studies have shown that anxiety disorders can run in families, which means that they can at least partly be inherited from one or both parents, similar to the genetic risk for heart disease or cancer. Moreover, certain environmental factors -- such as a trauma or significant event -- may trigger an anxiety disorder in people who have an inherited susceptibility to developing the disorder.

### **How Are Anxiety Disorders Treated?**

Fortunately, much progress has been made in the last two decades in the treatment of people with mental illnesses, including anxiety disorders. Although the exact treatment approach depends on the type of disorder, one or a combination of the following therapies may be used for most anxiety disorders:

**Medication:** Drugs used to reduce the symptoms of anxiety disorders include many antidepressants, certain anticonvulsant medicines and low-dose antipsychotics, and other anxiety-reducing drugs.

**Psychotherapy:** Psychotherapy (a type of counselling) addresses the emotional response to mental illness. It is a process in which trained mental health professionals help people by talking through strategies for understanding and dealing with their disorder.

**Cognitive-behavioural therapy and Acceptance Commitment Therapy:** These are particular types of psychotherapy in which the person learns to recognize and change thought patterns and behaviours that lead to troublesome feelings. Acceptance Commitment Therapy is mostly about acceptance of the condition and overcoming the anxiety and learning to cope with the triggers and events that overstimulate.

See your local GP for a referral to appropriate Psychologist. Everybody in Australia who is suffering from Mental Health Conditions, is able to access a Mental Health Care Plan which subsidises ongoing mental health professional care. This is available through Medicare.