



# ANXIETY DISORDERS

## WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety disorders are a class of illness associated with unreasonable and disturbing sensations of fear and tension for no apparent identifiable cause. There are several types of anxiety disorders—Panic Disorder, Agoraphobia (sometimes coexisting with Panic Disorder), Phobias, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Common symptoms of anxiety disorders include unrealistic or excessive worry, sleep disturbances, dizziness, jittering, racing or pounding heart, upset stomach, numbness in hands, face or feet, and fatigue. For descriptions of specific disorders, see below.

- **Panic Disorder** – A sudden, escalating fear for no apparent reason. The individual may feel like her or she is losing control, dying, or going crazy. Physical symptoms include heart palpitations, shortness of breath, sweating, faintness, and sensations of choking or smothering.
- **Agoraphobia** – A fear of being in a situation from which help or escape is not easily available, such as in a crowd or on a bridge. Often accompanies Panic Disorder.
- **Phobias** – Phobias occur in several forms. A *specific phobia* is a fear of a particular object or situation. *Social phobia* is a fear of being painfully embarrassed in a social setting.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder** – Recurrent, distressful intrusive thoughts that interfere with life's normal routines. Often leads to obsessive or repeated behaviors and compulsive rituals. Examples include an excessive fear of dirt or disease leading to incessant cleaning or hand washing, repeating a name or word over and over again, or checking and rechecking to confirm that a door is locked, an oven is off, or a window is shut.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** – A condition of terror caused by a specific traumatic event. Often accompanied by flashbacks, an exaggerated startle reaction, feelings of detachment, guilt and sleep problems. Although most people think of war veterans when they think of this disorder, anyone who has survived a significant mental or physical trauma (e.g., a car accident or sexual or physical assault) can develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder** – A chronic, constant worry about everyday life occurrences and activities. Sufferers feel “keyed up,” “on edge” and anxious. Other symptoms include muscle tension, irritability, difficulty sleeping, and fatigue. Often accompanied by depression.

## **HOW IS AN ANXIETY DISORDER DIAGNOSED?**

In order to make a diagnosis of an anxiety disorder, a mental health professional, in coordination with a medical doctor, will perform a thorough medical and psychiatric examination, inquiring into the individual's symptoms, how long they have been occurring and the level of distress they are causing. They will also ask about the individual's physical health, medical history, and whether or not the individual or individual's family has a history of mental illness. They will also consider the possibility of co-occurring mental illness, such as depression and/or substance abuse.

## **WHO GETS ANXIETY DISORDERS?**

Anxiety disorder are the nation's most common mental illness. Nearly 25% of the American population will suffer from an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that more than 28 million people develop an anxiety disorder every year.

## **WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS FOR ANXIETY DISORDERS?**

Treatments for anxiety disorders fall into two general types— cognitive and/ or behavioral therapy, and medication. Cognitive therapy helps patients learn to recognize thoughts and beliefs that trigger anxiety and learn new ways to deal with them. Behavioral therapy helps the patient learn to change self-defeating behaviors, relax muscle tension and react to stressors in a more positive way. These two therapies complement one another and can be used simultaneously. Medication can also be successfully used to alleviate the distressful and disruptive symptoms of anxiety disorders. Medication may be used in combination with cognitive/behavioral therapy.

## **IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE AN ANXIETY DISORDER . . .**

Remember, this problem is not your fault and it can be effectively treated. There is no reason to suffer in silence. Contact us for help. We provide private assessments for individuals and families. During this appointment, you'll learn more about the signs, symptoms and treatments for your illness. Take the next step. Reach out for help. Relief and recovery are the rewards.

**CALL 1-800-556-6249.**



**DARTMOUTH-HITCHCOCK PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATES**

*Source: National Mental Illness Screening Project.*