

Anxiety and Panic



Feeling worried at times is a normal part of life. Most people have some fear or anxiety about their problems. But if your worries interfere with your life, you may have a medical condition.

Anxiety disorders cause you to feel worried or fearful about daily activities and events. You may feel worried much of the time, which makes it hard to function in your daily life. Your anxiety may not always have an obvious cause.

Symptoms

Anxiety can cause physical and emotional symptoms. You may:

- Feel restless, irritable, or on edge.
- Worry much of the time.
- Tremble, shake, or sweat.
- Feel tightness in your throat or chest.
- Feel tired or have sleep problems.
- Have a headache or upset stomach.
- Be lightheaded.
- Find it hard to concentrate.
- Have a pounding or fast heartbeat.

Depression and anxiety disorders

Depression can occur along with anxiety disorders, and it is often confused with these other conditions. Anxiety or panic disorder also may be mistaken for depression.

It is important to get medical help if you think you may have any of these conditions. Your doctor can make the right diagnosis and help you with the right treatment. You may need different treatments for anxiety or panic disorders than you will for depression.

Types of anxiety

Anxiety with depression

Depression and anxiety are different conditions that can sometimes occur together. These conditions often have similar symptoms, but you may need separate treatments if you have both.

Symptoms of depression include feeling sad or hopeless. You also may have fatigue, sleep problems, and difficulty concentrating.

Generalized anxiety disorder

With generalized anxiety disorder, you feel worried or stressed about many daily events. This worrying interferes with your life and makes it hard to function. You also may have physical symptoms such as headaches or fatigue.

Social anxiety disorder

With social anxiety disorder, you feel very nervous about what you will say or do in front of others. This can make it hard to function in everyday life. You may have physical symptoms such as a fast heartbeat, sweating, or feeling shaky.

Panic attacks and panic disorder

A panic attack is a sudden, intense feeling of fear or anxiety. This scary feeling may be caused by a stressful situation, or it may happen without any obvious reason.

Some common symptoms of panic attacks include a pounding or fast heartbeat, a tight throat or choking feeling, nausea, sweating, or trembling.

People who have had a panic attack often worry about having another one. If you have had more than one panic attack or if you worry about the next time you will have an attack, then you may have panic disorder.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

OCD causes repeated unwanted thoughts. These thoughts get in the way of your normal thoughts and cause anxiety or fear. To get rid of the thoughts, you do the same tasks over and over.

Treatment

Different types of medicines and counseling are used to treat anxiety disorders and depression. If you have more than one of these conditions, you may need separate treatments.

In general, anxiety is treated with medicines, counseling, or both. Medicines include antidepressants and benzodiazepines.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy, a type of counseling, may be used to treat depression or anxiety. This therapy helps you change certain thoughts and actions that cause you stress.

Exposure therapy is a type of counseling used to treat anxiety. In this therapy, you learn to cope with stressful memories or situations by talking about them in a safe place.

How can I reduce anxiety?

Along with medicines and counseling, you can do things every day to lower your anxiety. For example:

- Walk or get other exercise.
- Meditate.
- Do yoga or deep breathing.
- Limit caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, and drugs.
- Get plenty of rest.

Resources

Anxiety Disorders Association of America:
www.adaa.org or (240) 485-1001

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH):
www.nimh.nih.gov or 1-866-615-6464 toll-free