



## **What is Anxiety?**

It is perfectly normal to feel anxious sometimes. It's an important emotion to feel, because it lets us know how important the outcome of our activities is to us (i.e., if we don't care, we won't feel anxious) and it also lets us know when we're in danger. A little bit of anxiety is a good thing and can enhance your performance on tasks (e.g., a little bit of anxiety about an exam makes you study harder, and thus, you could perform better). Alternatively, too much anxiety can affect our judgment and our ability to make simple decisions. Although there are occasions when high levels of anxiety are totally normal (like dangling off the ledge of a 10-story building), some people's bodies send them mixed signals, making them think that they are in danger when they're not (just looking out the window of a 10-story building). When this anxiety starts interfering with someone's ability to live a normal life, it's considered an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders cause substantial emotional, cognitive, and behavioral difficulties, and are one of the most common and most treatable mental disorders.

## Types of Anxiety Disorders

**Agoraphobia** is characterized by avoiding situations where escape might be difficult or embarrassing. The fear can be so intense that it leads some individuals to become completely housebound.

**Panic Disorder** is characterized by intense feelings of fear or terror, which come on for no apparent reason (i.e., panic attacks). Symptoms may include: dizziness, trembling, shortness of breath, heart racing, sweating, thoughts of death or dying, and chest pain. These attacks occur frequently and are associated with intense anxiety about getting another attack and avoidance of situations that may cause them.

**Social Anxiety Disorder (a.k.a. Social Phobia)** is characterized by avoidance of certain social or performance situations due to fear of being judged by or embarrassed in front of other people (e.g., fear of public speaking or eating in restaurants.)

**Specific Phobia** is characterized by intense fear of a specific situation or object, often leading to avoidance. (e.g., fear of heights or spiders.)

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** is characterized by recurring unwanted anxiety-producing thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors designed to reduce the anxiety caused by the obsessions (compulsions). The excessive amount of time given to these obsessive thoughts and compulsive actions often gets in the way of the person's ability to function normally [For example: fear of contamination (obsession) and constant hand washing (compulsion)]. Although the obsession and compulsion are clearly linked in this example, often the compulsion has no obvious connection to the obsession it's meant to alleviate.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** is characterized by excessive worrying about a number of events or activities. People with GAD often experience restlessness, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, headaches, fatigue, and sleep disturbance.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is characterized by repeated re-experiencing of a severely traumatic event (e.g., war, natural disaster, rape, assault, witnessing a murder) accompanied by increased arousal and avoidance of places and situations that remind the person of the event. For a diagnosis of PTSD, these symptoms need to last for at least one month. Most people exposed to a traumatic event will not develop PTSD.

## Tips for Coping with Anxious Feelings and/or Anxiety Disorders

Although not a substitute for treatment, the following tips can be helpful for people with an anxiety disorder and people experiencing regular anxiety.

**Exercise** – Exercise helps both physically and mentally.

**Relax** – Learn deep breathing techniques (such as Box Breathing); consider trying yoga or meditation.

**Get enough sleep** – Try to get 8 to 9 hours of sleep each night.

**Learn to laugh** – Laughing decreases anxious feelings

**No alcohol & drug consumption** – Be careful not to use alcohol, nicotine, or other drugs to “self-treat” anxiety.

**Reduce caffeine intake** – Caffeine makes your heart race, which can make anxiety worse.

**Eat a well-balanced diet** – Eating healthy, well-balanced meals and avoiding junk food when possible keeps you in your best form, so you're better able to cope with anxiety-provoking situations.

**Create a support network** – Talk to friends you can trust.

**Learn to manage your time** – Putting tasks off can become overwhelming. Get organized and review your daily tasks each morning. Break larger, more intimidating tasks down into smaller steps. Focus on one-step at a time. Learn to do the most important things first.

**Challenge your perfectionism** – Chill out, praise yourself for trying.

For more information on how to help yourself be well, visit:

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/toolbox/taking-charge-health-daily-checklist/>

### **How are Anxiety Disorders Treated?**

Anxiety Disorders may require professional treatment, including psychotherapy and/or medication.

#### **Medications: Selective Serotonin Reuptake-Inhibitors (SSRIs)**

For many people, mild to moderately severe Anxiety Disorders can be effectively treated with psychological interventions. Medications generally are considered for use if psychotherapy alone is not producing the hoped for results.

#### **Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)**

CBT is a form of talk therapy, which teaches specific thinking and behavioral skills. The goal of CBT is to help people to challenge their current way of thinking, so they can learn to change their anxious negative thoughts and gain control over their anxiety. CBT also teaches people to relax, problem-solve, and gradually face their fears. Gradual and supported exposure to the frightening situation/object is the most effective way to treat anxiety.

Avoidance of anxiety producing situations is also discouraged in CBT, as it only serves to make anxiety worse.

#### **Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)**

DBT is a cognitive behavioral treatment developed by Marsha Linehan, PhD, ABPP. It emphasizes individual psychotherapy and group skills training classes to help people learn and use new skills and strategies to develop a life that they experience as worth living. DBT skills include skills for mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness.

### **How Long Does Treatment Last?**

Depending on the person's needs, therapy can last 6-8 weeks or longer, usually with weekly or twice-weekly meetings. Some people may be able to resolve their anxiety sooner, whereas others may need more time. Often, people benefit from "booster sessions" over time to help maintain their gains and prevent the anxiety disorder from returning. Medications may be used to help with specific situations (such as in a fear of getting on an airplane) or they can be used for longer periods of time (e.g., 3 – 6 months), in order to decrease anxiety to the point where the individual is able to actively work on their fears in therapy.

## How to Help a Friend Who has an Anxiety Disorder

Having supportive and understanding friends is an essential component to recovering from an anxiety disorder. How can you help?

**Educate yourself** – Understanding what your friend is going through will help you better support them. It will also help alleviate frustrations that you may have about his or her behavior.

**Be supportive** – Encourage your friend when he or she is having a tough time and be empathetic to what he or she is going through. Be respectful but do not support avoidance of stressful situations.

**Don't try to change your friend** – Modify your expectations of how you want your friend to be and accept your friend for who he or she is.

**Communicate** – Be sure to listen with a nonjudgmental attitude. Help him or her find treatment. Sometimes it's hard to take the first step alone. Support your friend and encourage him/her to get help.

**Encourage** – Encourage your friend to confront stressful situations and support them through the experience, rather than avoiding anxiety-provoking situations. Avoidance can actually make the anxiety disorder worse.

**Be fun** – Sure it's good to have someone to talk to, but your friends need you to keep the fun going. Help make them laugh and relax.

## Other Resources

**Apps:** <https://angstmovie.com/resources-apps/>

**Articles:** <https://angstmovie.com/resources-articles/>

**Books:** <https://angstmovie.com/resources-books/>

**Helpful Websites:** <https://angstmovie.com/resources-helpful-websites/>

**Videos:** <https://angstmovie.com/resources-videos/>

## **Find a Therapist:**

Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

Detailed professional listings for psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, counselors, group therapy and treatment centers in the United States and Canada

The search can be narrowed by location, issue, age, sexuality, language, religious preference, treatment orientation, insurance accepted, etc.

Theravive: <https://www.theravive.com/>

A network of licensed and professional clinical counselors, therapists, and psychologists

The search can be narrowed by zip/city and specialty. Workshops, seminars, or events can also be found by topic, location, etc.