



Patient Information

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are medical illnesses that affect more than 19 million adults in the United States. Affected people feel overwhelming anxiety and fear.

Unlike the relatively mild, short-lived anxiety a stressful event (such as a business presentation or a first date) can cause, anxiety disorders are constant and long-lasting, and they can get progressively worse if they aren't treated.

The good news is that safe and effective treatments for anxiety disorders are available, and researchers are continually discovering new therapies that can help people with anxiety disorders lead happy, productive lives.

Common types of anxiety disorders are:

- generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- panic disorder
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- social phobia (or social anxiety disorder)
- specific phobias.

Each anxiety disorder has its own unique features, but excessive, irrational fear and a prevailing sense of dread are common to all of them.

If you're concerned that you or someone you know could be suffering from an anxiety disorder, take a look at the checklist below and discuss the results with your nurse practitioner. Remember, medication and talk therapy are effective for many anxiety disorders. With the right treatment, most people with anxiety disorders can lead productive, fulfilling lives.

You may have GAD if:

- You're always worried, even when there are no signs of trouble.
- You have frequent aches and pains that can't be connected to physical illness or injury.
- You get tired easily, yet you have trouble sleeping.
- Your body is constantly tense.

You may have panic disorder if:

- You have feelings of terror that occur suddenly and repeatedly, without warning.
- Out of the blue, your heart starts pounding.
- You feel dizzy.
- You can't breathe.
- You feel like you're about to die.
- You've had these symptoms over and over again.

You may have PTSD if:

- You have had nightmares almost every night since your experienced a traumatic event.
- The event is over, but the terrifying flashbacks continue.
- You avoid places that remind you of the event.
- You feel that you cannot trust anyone.

You may have OCD if:

- You are so afraid of germs that you wash your hands repeatedly until they're raw and sore.
- You can't leave the house until you check the locks on every window and door over and over again.
- You are terrified that you will harm someone you care about.
- You spend long periods of time touching or counting things.
- Your days are filled with the urgent need to engage in certain rituals, or you can't get certain repetitive thoughts out of your head.

You may have social phobia if:

- Every day, you fear you will do something very embarrassing and be humiliated or judged by others harshly.
- You've stopped getting involved in social situations because you're afraid to meet new people.
- When other people look at you, you break out in a sweat and shake uncontrollably.
- You stay home from work because you're terrified of being called on in a staff meeting (or some similar fear).

Based on information from the National Institute of Mental Health Web site at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/home.cfm>.

Additional Notes:
