



Anxiety disorders and how to cope

Anxiety disorders are serious medical illnesses. About 40 million American adults have them. Anxiety is severe worry or fear. It is not the same as mild stress. Stress can happen when speaking in front of others. Or going on a job interview. Anxiety disorders last for a long time. They may get in the way of a person's daily life. They can get worse if not treated.

Many people with anxiety have physical symptoms such as:

- Rapid or uneven heartbeat.
- Shortness of breath.
- Dizziness.
- Light-headedness.
- Stomachaches.
- Nausea.
- Headaches.
- Other pains.

Anxiety disorders may be caused by chemicals in the brain. They often run in families. They can be treated. But only about one-third of people get treatment. Without treatment, many people turn to alcohol and drugs. They do this to try to control their anxiety.

Types of anxiety disorders

There are a number of types of anxiety disorders.

- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). This is extreme worry about everyday things that lasts at least six months.
- Panic disorder. This involves severe attacks of terror without a specific cause.
- Social anxiety disorder (social phobia). This is when a person avoids social situations due to extreme worry about being judged.
- Specific phobias. These involve intense fear of an object, place, or situation. It's a fear of things like riding in elevators. Or driving on highways. A person may fear heights or insects. The fear leads the person to avoid the object or place.
- Agoraphobia. This is when people avoid public places for fear of having a panic attack.

Identifying anxiety disorders

If you think you might have an anxiety disorder, you should see a doctor. A doctor will ask about your symptoms. They will ask about your feelings of worry and tension. Doctors often perform physical exams and medical tests. This helps them be sure that the anxiety is not caused by a physical problem. Or the use of drugs or alcohol. A doctor will ask about your health history. They will ask about things that make the problem better or worse. This helps figure out the type of disorder. All of this helps the doctor with your treatment.

Treatment

There are different ways to treat these disorders.

- **Self-education.** This can help you feel more at ease. It can help you learn about treatments.
- **Therapy.** This helps you learn ways to cope with things that cause anxiety. It can help improve how you get along with other.
- **Exercise.** Fifteen or 20 minutes of mild exercise per day, such as walking, can ease anxiety.
- **Meditation or deep breathing.** These techniques can help you relax.
- **Medicines.** There are drugs that help with anxiety and depression. They can help therapy work better. The drugs break the cycle of anxiety. This can help you in your daily life.

How to cope with anxiety each day

It can be hard to cope with anxiety. Here are some tips for dealing with it.

- **Talk to someone.** Discuss your fears with someone you trust.
- **Plan ahead.** Plan for situations that may cause anxiety. This could be speaking in front of others. Or being in an uncomfortable place. Think about feeling calm and in control.
- **Don't try to do too much.** Taking on too much at once can cause anxiety.
- **Confront your fears.** Face your anxieties one at a time. Anxiety is real but you can learn to cope with it.
- **Avoid smoking and alcohol.** These habits can make anxiety worse.
- **Eat healthy foods.** A balanced diet is good for the mind and body.

To learn more:

There are groups that help people with anxiety disorders. Two are listed here.

Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

www.adaa.org.

Freedom From Fear.

www.freedomfromfear.org.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Healthcare does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.