



SHIAWASSEE Health & Wellness

Let's Talk About ANXIETY DISORDERS

What are Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress. Sometimes it can be positive, for example, if it helps you deal with a tense situation in the office, study harder for an exam, handle a new situation, or stay focused on an important task. In general, it helps people cope. But when anxiety becomes excessive, doesn't fit the situation, or lasts a long time, it can get in the way of your everyday activities and may interfere with how you get along with others.

There are several types of anxiety disorders with a variety of symptoms. Some people have repeated short term episodes of intense fear, while others have exaggerated worry and tension most of the time or in everyday social situations. Sometimes, the anxiety comes with physical symptoms like heart pounding, trouble breathing, trembling, sweating, or being easily startled. Other times, anxiety disorders can include ongoing, unwanted thoughts, or repetitive behaviors.

Common anxiety disorders include panic disorder, social phobia, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). No matter which type of condition you may have, it is important to know that most people with anxiety disorders can be helped with professional care.

Some Veterans develop an anxiety disorder following severe trauma or a life-threatening event. For others, stressful life events such as transitioning to civilian life or difficult work situations contribute to anxiety disorders. It can be hard for some Veterans and Service members to "turn off" some of the strategies and behaviors that were necessary for military situations.

What are the Signs of Anxiety Disorders?

A wide variety of symptoms may be signs of an anxiety disorder, some of which may be physical symptoms:

Trembling, twitching, or shaking
Having difficulty catching your breath
Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
Feeling jumpy
Having trouble with sleep or getting a good night's rest

Feeling a fullness in the throat or chest
Feeling like your head is pounding
Sweating or cold, clammy hands
Having aches, tense muscles, or soreness
Feeling extremely tired

You might also have symptoms that impact your emotions, thoughts, or behavior, like:

Feeling restless
Being angry or irritable
Fearing that something bad is going to happen
Having difficulty concentrating
Finding it hard to do your work or normal activities
Worrying about everyday decisions for several days in a row

Feeling on edge or keyed up
Feeling doomed
Becoming easily distracted
Feeling like your mind goes blank

It's not just the symptoms of an anxiety disorder but also how you react to them that can disrupt your life. You may:

- Frequently avoid certain places or things
- Drink or use drugs to numb your feelings
- Consider harming yourself or others
- Start working all the time to occupy your mind
- Pull away from other people and become isolated
- Have an explosive temper when things go wrong
- Find it hard to express your opinion or be assertive
- Focus on what isn't going well or what could go wrong
- Not give yourself enough credit when you do well or accomplish something

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What are Treatments for Anxiety Disorders?

There are a number of effective treatments for anxiety disorders that can help you cope with these symptoms and greatly improve your quality of life. Many Veterans have found effective ways to deal with their anxiety.

Treatments for anxiety disorders can involve counseling, medication, or a combination of these.

Counseling can help you learn new ways of thinking, practice positive behaviors, and take active steps to move beyond your symptoms. Medications work in different ways to affect the chemicals in your brain that may be associated with anxiety disorders.

Anxiety disorders often occur along with other mental or physical conditions, including alcohol or drug problems, which may mask anxiety symptoms or make them worse. In some cases, it will be important to treat other problems in order to get the full benefits from anxiety disorder treatment. You may need to work with your doctor or counselor and try different types of treatment before finding the one that's best for dealing with your symptoms.

In addition to getting treatment, you can adjust your lifestyle to help relieve anxiety symptoms. Try to work these into your daily routine:

- Walk, jog, or work out – Physical activity can improve your mood and help you sleep better
- Eat healthy meals regularly – Good nutrition helps your body and your mind
- Sleep well – Enough quality sleep can help you feel better
- Practice relaxation techniques – A shower, deep breathing, or time in a quiet place to collect your thoughts can help relieve stress and make you feel more at ease
- Get involved - Volunteer, join a club, or take up a hobby to share your strengths and wisdom with others

What can I do if I think I have an Anxiety Disorder?

Your close friends and family may be the first to notice that you're having a tough time. Turn to them when you are ready to talk. It can be helpful to share what you're experiencing, and they may be able to provide support and help you find treatment that is right for you.

Take the Next Step – Make the Connection

Every day, people connect with helpful resources and effective treatments for anxiety disorders and find solutions that improve their lives. It can be difficult to handle anxiety symptoms on your own and they can get worse if not addressed, so talking with your family and friends can be a first step. You can also consider connecting with:

- Your family doctor: Ask if your doctor has experience treating Veterans or can refer you to someone who does
- A mental health professional, such as a therapist
- A spiritual or religious advisor