

Anxiety Disorders: A Guide for Consumers

For the best results from treatment, you need to play an active role in your own recovery! This guide will help you recognize if you have an anxiety disorder and help you make choices about treatment options.

Symptoms of anxiety can be very frightening. People often think they are having a heart attack. There are a number of different types of anxiety disorders and they happen to both children and adults. People who have the type called Panic Disorder have sudden feelings of fear and terror, like something really bad is about to happen. They may experience shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, chest pain, and choking or smothering feelings.

Another type of anxiety disorder is a Phobia. Phobias are an intense fear of certain objects or situations. Some people have a fear of leaving their house, while others fear heights and still others fear flying or snakes or spiders.

Sometimes a phobia can cause panic attacks. Not all phobias require treatment unless they cause you significant problems in your everyday life.

Some people have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder where they feel driven to do certain things over and over. Repeating things helps people with this disorder feel less nervous. Sometimes people have repetitive thoughts that just don't seem to want to stop. These thoughts are about things you would not normally do or concerns about things that most people wouldn't worry about like shouting obscenities in church,

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being afraid of germs all the time, or hurting someone. People with OCD try to ignore these thoughts by doing things like praying or counting silently; by repeated hand washing or constant checking to make sure nothing bad will happen.

Individuals who have experienced a traumatic event may show signs of anxiety long after the event. This disorder is called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In addition to some of the panic symptoms mentioned above, the person might re-live the event, avoid things that remind them of what happened or constantly be on alert. This disorder is commonly seen in people, who have been in a war, victims of abuse and rape, people who have had severe medical crises and people who have been in accidents or disasters.

There are other people who worry constantly and can't stop it. This disorder is called Generalized Anxiety. People with this disorder are tense, may experience aches and pains, clammy hands, dry mouth, shaking, nausea and sweating. The symptoms are way out of proportion

to what is really going on in the person's life.

If you think you or someone you care about has these symptoms you should seek help from a trained professional. The worker who sees you will ask you many questions about your family history, your life, your medical problems, whether you drink or do drugs and how often and how much. You will be asked specific questions about your symptoms. Do not be offended by these questions. Answer them as well as you can. The answers will help the worker decide what kind of treatment you need.

There are a number of ways to help people with anxiety disorders. Some treatments are specific to the particular disorder you may have. Research indicates that some things are helpful for all anxiety disorders such as exercise, talking with a professional or someone who has had the same experience, and doing relaxation exercises. Phobias can be dealt with by desensitizing you to the feared object or situation in a gradual way so that you will be less afraid and feel safer. A type of counseling called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has

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also been effective. CBT helps people change their way of thinking about certain things.

Most anxiety disorders also respond to medication that is given for a short period of time. If you have an anxiety disorder, the worker may refer you to the psychiatrist to see if medication will help you. Most research says that antidepressants are the best medication for anxiety disorders. Usually this type of medicine is continued for at least six months and then tapered off gradually. Sometimes people have a relapse and need to continue on medication for a longer time. People with an anxiety disorder seem to do best when they participate in therapy and practice the techniques they have learned.

Resources:

Anxiety Disorder Association of America

www.adaa.org

1-800-922-8947

National Institute for Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.org

Phone: (301) 443-4513

TTY: (310) 443-8431

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)

Colonial Place Three

2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300

Arlington, VA 22201-3042

Phone: (703) 524-7600

Information and Service Center: 1-800-950-NAMI

www.nami.org

Mental Health Association of Michigan (MHAM)

www.mha-mi.org

30233 Southfield Rd., Ste 220

Southfield, MI 48076

Phone (248) 647-1711

Fax (248) 647-1732

National Mental Health Association

2001 North Beauregard St, 12th floor

Alexandria, VA 22311

Phone: 1-800-969-NMHA (800-969-6642)

www.nmha.org