

# Anxiety

**Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress or danger, but constant feelings of tension or fear may be due to an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders make life difficult. Most anxiety disorders can be treated successfully, usually with a combination of counselling and medicines.**

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders in Australia. One in four people will experience an anxiety disorder at some time in their life.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of anxiety can vary from person to person and may include:

- Feeling irritable, restless or out of control
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- A fear that something bad will happen
- A fast heart beat
- Sweating
- Headache
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea

- Trembling
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Tense muscles (e.g. sore back, neck or jaw)
- Chest pains or tightness
- Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing
- A feeling of choking or a lump in the throat
- Fatigue
- Visual disturbances.

These symptoms may be part of a normal reaction to stress or danger, but they tend to be worse and last for longer when due to an anxiety disorder.

## Anxiety disorders

There are several different forms of anxiety disorder including:

### Generalised anxiety disorder

A generalised anxiety disorder involves almost constant (on most days for at least 6 months) anxiety and worry, usually about real issues such as work, money, health, relationships or safety.

### Phobias

A phobia is an intense fear of something (e.g., heights, animals, closed spaces, social situations). A person with a phobia will try to avoid what they fear and this behaviour can significantly interfere with their life.

### Panic disorder

People with panic disorder have sudden, attacks of intense fear and anxiety ('panic attacks') that may or may not be connected to a stressful situation. A person experiencing a panic attack may feel that the anxiety cannot be brought under control.

### Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

People with OCD have constant thoughts and fears (obsessions) that cause anxiety and lead them to continually repeat certain tasks or rituals (compulsions) in order to feel less anxious.

For example, they may worry about cleanliness and need to wash their hands repeatedly, or be concerned that they did not lock a door and have to check it constantly. These tasks can be

time consuming and interfere with daily life. People with this condition usually know their behaviour is not sensible, are embarrassed by it and try to hide it.

### Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a serious psychological reaction that some people develop after an extremely frightening or traumatic experience such as war, abuse, a natural disaster or a major accident. PTSD can develop a long time after the traumatic event is over. Symptoms include intrusive memories, nightmares, numbed feelings, anxiety and/or depression.

## Management

Treatment of an anxiety disorder often involves several different strategies including:

- Finding and avoiding triggers
- Counselling and psychological treatments to help a person change their thought patterns and the way they react to certain situations (e.g., cognitive behaviour therapy)
- Relaxation therapy (e.g., slow deep breathing, relaxing muscles).
- Physical exercise
- Medicines.

Many people with anxiety problems also have depression and need help for both conditions.

## Medicines

Prescription medicines for anxiety disorders include:

- Anti-anxiety and sedative medicines
- Antidepressant medicines.

It is important to consult your doctor or pharmacist before:

- Stopping regular medicines for anxiety – as stopping suddenly can make anxiety symptoms worse
- Taking any other medicines (including complementary medicines) in addition to medicines prescribed for anxiety – as they may interfere with each other's actions.

## Self care

- Share your anxious thoughts and feelings with someone you trust.
- Learn about your anxiety disorder and how to manage it.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week, to improve general health and well-being, sleep and mood.
- Learn and use relaxation techniques to relax your body and mind.
- Get plenty of sleep and relaxation.
- Eat a healthy, well balanced diet, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Don't smoke. Nicotine may worsen anxiety symptoms.

## Important

Anxiety symptoms can be affected by:

- Some medical conditions (e.g., heart and thyroid problems)
- Some medicines
- Some addictive and illegal drugs.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

- Limit alcohol. It may worsen anxiety symptoms.
- Limit caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks). It may worsen anxiety symptoms.

## Getting help

Help is available for people with anxiety disorders and their families and friends. Doctors, psychologists and counsellors can give professional help and there are community support groups for many types of anxiety disorders.

## For more information

### **A doctor**

Listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

### **Beyond Blue**

Info Line phone: 1300 22 4636  
Website: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or  
youth website [www.ybblue.com.au](http://www.ybblue.com.au)

### **Kids Helpline**

Phone: 1800 55 1800  
Website: [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

### **Lifeline**

Phone: 13 11 14 (24 hours, Australia-wide)  
Website: [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### **MoodGYM cognitive behaviour therapy training program**

Website [www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au)

### **BlueBoard online support group**

Website: [www.blueboard.anu.edu.au](http://www.blueboard.anu.edu.au)

### **Ecouch self help interactive program**

Website: [www.ecouch.anu.edu.au](http://www.ecouch.anu.edu.au)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222  
Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### **National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)  
Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **The Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

### **Related fact cards**

- » *Alcohol*
- » *Depression*
- » *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- » *Relaxation Techniques*
- » *Sleeping Problems*
- » *Smoking*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: