

# Is my Anxiety normal?

**Normal Anxiety.** Anxiety, fears, and worry are normal parts of our human experience. Under certain circumstances, anxiety helps to heighten our alertness and prepares our body for action. Mild anxiety about an upcoming event (like an exam) encourages preparation. So at a mild level, anxiety can help enhance our readiness as well as our performance.

**Extreme Anxiety.** When fears and worries become overwhelming and consistently interfere with daily living and ability to cope effectively, this may be a sign of an Anxiety Disorder. Estimates suggest that a significant portion of the population suffers from anxiety disorders, the symptoms of which can last for months and intrude on all of the person's thoughts and activities.

**Physical Signs.** Anxiety can affect a person's thoughts and feelings as well as their body. Sometimes physical signs (e.g., dizziness, nausea, heart palpitations, tightness in muscles, fatigue) accompany feelings of anxiety and can be quite pronounced. Physical symptoms can increase anxiety when there is worry about having a disease.

**Types of Anxiety Problems.** Several different anxiety disorders have been recognized and treatments developed.

**Panic Disorder.** People suffer recurrent panic attacks which lead to worry about having future attacks and worry that attacks may cause the person to die, go crazy, or lose control.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder.** A general pathological anxiety that causes excessive worry and tension. Almost every aspect of life is subject to "what-if" worries.

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.** Obsessions are unwanted and intrusive thoughts that are unreasonable. Compulsions are repetitive behaviors or thoughts that one feels driven to complete to reduce the anxiety associated with the obsession.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** This anxiety disorder can occur in people of any age who have been exposed to a traumatic situation in which they were in serious danger or saw someone in serious danger.

**Social Phobia.** The person with social phobia suffers from pathological fears and avoidance of social situation(s). The person with this problem fears that they will do something that will be embarrassing or humiliating.

**Simple Phobia.** A simple phobia involves an extreme unrealistic fear that is not logical and not shared by most people.

## How to Cope

In dealing with anxiety, avoiding thoughts/feelings/situations that make you anxious as a strategy tends to only prolong the problem. Rather, work on changing beliefs, assumptions, and ways of thinking that may be contributing to your distress. Furthermore, you may find talking about your difficulty with friends and loved ones to be helpful. If your anxiety problem is not getting better or worsens over time, visiting a counselor is recommended. Finally, realize that you may not be at fault for your anxiety problem as research has suggested that some anxiety disorders may have a genetic component.

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