

What is Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are a group of neurotic disorders where the main focus of the problem is excessive or uncontrolled worry.

Anxiety disorder is very common. A rough estimate is that all the anxiety disorders together may affect up to 25% to 30% of the population. For panic disorder, the estimate is up to 5%, with women outnumbering men by two to three times. They most commonly develop in early adulthood, with a mean age of presentation about 25 years old, but the disorder can develop at any age. They have been reported in children and adolescents and are probably being under-reported in this age group. Most of them also suffer from depression as a result of severe symptoms and continuing fear and apprehension.

Many theories have been postulated for anxiety disorders but the current belief is that it is a combination of biological and psychological changes. The patient probably inherits a gene that predisposes him to the disorder. Almost 50% of e.g. panic disorder patients have parents with the same disorder.

Many researches have also indicated that such patients have biases or abnormalities in their cognitive processing compared to normal subjects. Whether these abnormalities may cause abnormal levels of neurotransmitters in the brain or is a result of them is still debatable, but abnormal levels of neurotransmitters have been established in most patients.

Anxiety is a commonly experiences symptom. Most of us feel anxious and tense in the face of threatening or stressful situations. Such feelings are normal reactions to stress thus anxiety is an alerting signal; it warns of impending danger and enables the person to take measures to deal with a threat.

Anxiety is considered abnormal when they;

- ✓ Are abnormally severe or prolonged
- ✓ Occur in the absence of stressful circumstances.
- ✓ Associated with impaired physical, social or occupational functioning.

Anxiety disorders include a group of disorders in which anxiety is the main symptom.

Below are some anxiety disorders:

Generalised Anxiety Disorders

This means persistent and overblown worry about two or more things, without good reason. It is characterised by unrealistic or excessive anxiety about various everyday circumstances, fear of negative evaluation by others and worries about physical health.

Phobias

These are unrealistic fears of certain objects or situations. Examples include simple phobias, such as fear of snakes; social phobias such as fear of meeting new people; and agoraphobia, such as being afraid to go outside alone.

Panic Disorders

Characterised by a sudden and unexpected sense of terror, and feelings of approaching death. Accompanying physical signs include rapid pulse, nausea and shallow breathing.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders

Repeated, unwanted thoughts (ruminations) or compulsive behaviours (rituals). Obsessions mean persistent, senseless ideas, such as continual fear of contamination or illness. Examples of compulsions include repetitive cleaning, checking or counting.

Symptoms of Common Anxiety Disorders

- a) Worry or fear that something bad will happen
- b) Trembling, twitching or feeling shaky
- c) Fatigue or restlessness
- d) Muscle tension or jitteriness
- e) Feeling dizzy or lightheaded - faintness
- f) Fast heartbeat or breathing rate
- g) Sweating, or cold and clammy hands

- h) Dry mouth, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- i) Irritability, impatience, easily distracted
- j) Shortness of breath – breathlessness- difficulty breathing
- k) Difficulty swallowing
- l) Sharp pains in the chest or chest discomfort
- m) Abdominal pain – stomach pain
- n) Hot or cold flashes
- o) Fears of losing control, dying or “going crazy”

Some anxiety symptoms may occur in anyone experiencing a difficult situation. The difference between such “normal” anxiety and an anxiety disorder is that the anxiety disorder’s overwhelming tensions happen even when there is no real danger. People with an anxiety disorder may often take extreme actions to avoid the source of their anxiety. If several of the above symptoms seems clearly associated with a specific situation or object, and persist over time, you may need to seek help from a doctor.