

The National Institute of Mental Health's toll-free information line is 1-888-ANXIETY; their web address is www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/anxietymenu.cfm.

What are anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders range from feelings of uneasiness to immobilizing bouts of terror. This fact sheet is not exhaustive, nor does it include the full range of symptoms and treatments.

Anxiety disorders may develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events. An estimated 19 million adult Americans suffer from anxiety disorders. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet only about one-third of those suffering from an anxiety disorder receive treatment.

If you believe you or a loved one has an anxiety disorder, seek professional advice or another form of support.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Most people experience anxiety at some point in their lives and some nervousness in anticipation of a real situation. However if a person cannot shake unwarranted worries, or if the feelings are jarring to the point of avoiding everyday activities, he or she most likely has an anxiety disorder.

Symptoms: Chronic, exaggerated worry, tension, and irritability that appear to have no cause or are more intense than the situation warrants. Physical signs, such as restlessness, trouble falling or staying asleep, headaches, trembling, twitching, muscle tension, or sweating, often accompany these psychological symptoms.

Treatment: Anxiety is among the most common, most treatable mental disorders. Effective treatments include cognitive behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques, and biofeedback to control muscle tension. Medication, most commonly include a variety of anti-anxiety drugs.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Researchers now know that anyone, even children, can develop PTSD if they have experienced, witnessed, or participated in a traumatic occurrence-especially if the event was life threatening. PTSD can result from terrifying experiences such as rape, kidnapping, natural disasters, or war or serious accidents such as airplane crashes. The psychological damage such incidents cause can interfere with a person's ability to hold a job or to develop intimate relationships with others.

Symptoms: The symptoms of PTSD can range from constantly reliving the event to a general emotional numbing. Persistent anxiety, exaggerated startle reactions, difficulty concentrating, nightmares, and insomnia are common. People with PTSD typically avoid situations that remind them of the traumatic event, because they provoke intense distress or even panic attacks.

Treatment: Psychotherapy can help people who have PTSD regain a sense of control over their lives. They also may need cognitive behavior therapy to change painful and intrusive patterns of behavior and thought and to learn relaxation techniques. Support from family and friends can help speed recovery and healing. Medications, such as antidepressants and anti-anxiety agents to reduce anxiety, can ease the symptoms of depression and sleep problems. Treatment for PTSD often includes both psychotherapy and medication.

INFORMATION

Obtained from: National Institute of Mental Health

Website: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>