

Mental Health Awareness Factsheet

What is Anxiety?

Everyone feels anxious at some point. It is a natural response and helps to protect us from danger.

Anxiety disorders are something different and are often triggered by stress. Whilst anxiety is usually in response to outside events and forces, it is possible to create an anxiety disorder through negative self-talk – in other words, people who always tell themselves the worst will happen.

Anxiety is a feeling of fear or panic, stress, tension or worry that can become a mental health issue if you are feeling this way all or most of the time. Anxiety is a very common issue and can range from checking you've locked the front door a number of times before leaving your house to agoraphobia.

An anxiety disorder makes it difficult, or impossible, to do the things you normally like doing or are able to do.

As well as general anxiety there are a number of different types of anxiety disorder and more than one can be experienced at the same time. These include:

Panic disorder - when you experience panic attacks

Social phobia - where you fear social situations

Obsessive Compulsive disorder (OCD) - when people feel compelled to perform repetitive behaviours

Post Traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD) – some people experience this after witnessing or suffering a life-threatening event

Anxiety problems are one of the most common mental health issues, and it is also very common to experience a mixture of anxiety and depression. Just like depression, anxiety is a real illness, it is not something that's just "in your head" or that you can just "snap out of" (people who say these kinds of things are simply uneducated in this area). And, just like depression, anxiety can be treated.

So, how would you spot anxiety? Well, someone with anxiety may feel scared, worried, on edge or nervous a lot of the time. They might find it hard to concentrate, constantly overthinking things or having mental blocks, making it difficult to make decisions. Often this can result in feelings of anger, confusion, irritability, impatience and restlessness. Sleep can be affected by vivid dreams leading to tiredness and, sometimes, unwanted, unpleasant, repetitive thoughts.

People with anxiety often want to avoid or escape from social situations as they may find them extremely distressing. Some sufferers adopt repetitive compulsive behaviours that can become phobic.

Anxiety can be very physical with symptoms including dry mouth, palpitations, hyperventilating and chest pains. It is common to feel, or be, sick or to have diarrhoea. In some cases, there may also be panic attacks or blackouts.

If you notice these signs and symptoms in yourself then you should go and talk to a medical professional.



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