

What Is Anxiety Disorder?

Everyone worries at some point about something. However, the worry experienced by people with anxiety disorder is clearly out of proportion to the actual likelihood or impact of the feared event. The worry is excessive and longstanding.

Anxiety disorder is characterized by excessive anxiety and worry that occurs more days than not for a period of at least six months. A person with anxiety has at least three of the following symptoms: restlessness, being easily fatigued, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension and disturbed sleep.

Topics of worry may include health, finances, job responsibilities, safety of one's children or even being late for appointments. The worry is difficult to control and interferes with daily life. For example, an individual with anxiety disorder may feel that aches and pains are the signs of a significant health concern, like cancer, instead of the result of over activity at the gym that day. These feelings of worry and dread are accompanied by physical symptoms such as pain from muscle tension, headache, frequent urination, difficulty swallowing, "lump in the throat" or exaggerated startle response.

While the exact cause of anxiety disorder is uncertain, experts feel that it's a combination of biological factors and life events. It's not uncommon for some people with anxiety to also have other medical disorders such as depression or panic disorder. These may be influenced by the activity of certain chemical systems in the brain.

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