

Understanding Mental Illness: Anxiety Disorders

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is much more than the normal anxiety people experience day to day. It's chronic and fills one's day with exaggerated worry and tension, even though there is little or nothing to provoke it. People with an anxiety disorder may understand that their reactions aren't logical, but they cannot control them. Symptoms can arise without warning.

Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder include:

- Anticipation of disaster
- Worrying excessively about health, money, family or work
- Feeling overwhelmed by daily routines or tasks
- Inability to overcome concerns; concerns may intensify
- Difficulty relaxing; easily startled
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Difficulty concentrating
- Physical symptoms such as: fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, muscle aches, difficulty swallowing, trembling, twitching, irritability, sweating, hot flashes, light-headedness, shortness of breath, nausea, frequent urination

Other types of anxiety disorders include:

Panic Disorder - characterized by feelings of terror with no apparent reason. The anxiety manifests in a true physical experience similar to a heart attack or other medical emergency that comes with no warning.

Phobias - a deep-seated fear that is irrational and attached to a feared object, situation or activity.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) - obsessions (repeated, upsetting thoughts and images) consume an individual's life, leading to engagement in repetitive rituals (compulsions) in an attempt to reduce anxiety.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - survivors of disaster or trauma re-experience the event in flashbacks, nightmares and involuntary remembrances often triggering the same physical symptoms they experienced during the incident.

An anxiety disorder is usually accompanied by another problem such as depression, substance abuse, an eating disorder or another anxiety disorder (i.e. social phobia or panic disorder). Ideally, these problems

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What You Need to Know...



should be treated at the same time. As with most mental illnesses, a combination of medication and psychotherapy is often effective. All categories of anxiety disorder are treatable. For additional information about anxiety disorders, contact: your county's Department of Health and Human Services behavioral health division, your primary care physician, a psychologist or therapist, your insurance provider or a clergyperson.

For more information, contact Mental Health America of Wisconsin at 414.276.3122, or via Email: info@mhawisconsin.org.

Mental Health America is a United Way of Greater Milwaukee Agency.



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