



ANXIETY DISORDERS

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Everyone experiences symptoms of anxiety. These symptoms are generally occasional, short-lived, and do not cause problems. But when the mental, physical, and behavioural symptoms of anxiety are persistent and severe, and anxiety causes distress in a person's life to the point where it negatively affects their ability to work or study, socialize and manage daily tasks, it may be beyond the normal range.



Types of anxiety disorders:

- ✓ Specific phobia;
- ✓ Panic disorder;
- ✓ Agoraphobia;
- ✓ Generalized anxiety disorder;
- ✓ Social anxiety disorder;
- ✓ Selective mutism; and
- ✓ Separation anxiety disorder.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY?

Each anxiety disorder is distinct, but they all share the same hallmark features: 1) irrational and excessive fear; 2) worried and tense feelings; and 3) difficulty managing daily tasks and/or feeling distress related to these tasks.



Symptoms of Anxiety:

- ✓ Anxious thoughts (e.g., "I'm wrecking everything");
- ✓ Anxious predictions (e.g., "The barn will burn down because I'm away");
- ✓ Anxious beliefs (e.g., "I will lose the farm");
- ✓ Safety behaviours (habits to minimize anxiety and feel "safer");
- ✓ Avoidance of feared situations (e.g., "I can't face climbing the silo");
- ✓ Avoidance of activities that elicit sensations similar to those experienced when anxious;
- ✓ Subtle avoidances (behaviours that aim to distract the person, e.g., talking more during periods of anxiety); *and*



- ✓ Excessive physical reactions to relative to the context of what is happening.

Physical symptoms of anxiety may be mistaken for physical illness, such as a heart attack (e.g., shortness of breath, chest pain, feeling faint). Several factors determine whether the anxiety requires the attention of a mental health professional, including:

- ✓ Degree of distress experienced;
- ✓ How much the symptoms affect the person's ability to work or study, socialize, and manage daily tasks; *and*
- ✓ Situations in which the anxiety occurs.

WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?

A panic attack is a sudden episode of intense fear that triggers severe physical reactions when there is no real danger or apparent cause. When a panic attack occurs, an individual may think that they are losing control, having a heart attack, or even dying.²

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS OF ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety disorders are caused by a combination of biological factors, psychological factors, and challenging life experiences, including:

- ✓ Stressful or traumatic life event;
- ✓ Family history of anxiety disorders;
- ✓ Childhood development issues;
- ✓ Alcohol, medications, or illegal substances; and
- ✓ Other medical or psychiatric problems.



WHAT ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR ANXIETY DISORDERS?

If you or someone you know is experiencing anxiety, please seek help from a mental health professional. There are many psychological treatments for anxiety disorders, including:

- ✓ Relaxation training, meditation, biofeedback, and stress management;
- ✓ Counselling, or couples or family therapy;
- ✓ Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT);
- ✓ Medications are also effective;
- ✓ Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)¹.

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¹ Hofmann, S., Sawyer, A., Witt, A., Oh, D. The Effect of Mindfulness-Based Therapy on Anxiety and Depression: A Meta-Analytic Review. *J Consult Clin Psychol*. 2010 April ; 78(2): 169–183. doi:10.1037/a0018555.

² Mayo Clinic. Panic attacks and panic disorder. *Patient Care & Health Information; Diseases & Conditions*. May, 2018. Accessed on October 3, 2018: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/panic-attacks/symptoms-causes/syc-20376021>