

Anxiety is a state of being worried about certain real or imagined events or situations.

What to look for

- heart palpitations.
- tics or twitches
- recurring headaches or migraine
- indigestion and bowel irregularity
- sense of impending doom.
- inability to concentrate.
- muscle tension; muscle aches.
- diarrhoea.
- chest pain.
- dry mouth.
- excessive sweating.
- undereating or overeating.
- insomnia.
- irritability.
- breathlessness; hyperventilation.
- loss of sex drive. (See impotence.)

For school-age children:

- fear of being away from home.
- refusal to go to school.
- fear of strangers.
- unnecessary worry.

Anxiety is a normal human response. Sudden intense stress or fear questions our survival instinct, causes a chemical and a physical response... Which is all to do with the way the body prepares to deal with danger.

Adrenalins and cortisone are released in the bloodstream; heart rate quickens; breathing becomes shallow and rapid; muscles tense; sugar is released by the liver; and the mind goes on full alert. But when anxiety is not tied to an identifiable threat or is more severe and long-lasting than warranted, it is a clinical disorder.

Many different anxiety disorders are recognized. Among them are

- **Phobias** (fear of certain situations, such as confining spaces, or of particular things, such as insects);
- **Panic attacks** (a sudden onset of extreme fear or tension, for no evident reason);
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder** (persistent, irrational thoughts, such as a dread of infection, or repetitive behaviour, such as checking that doors are locked);
- **Posttraumatic stress disorder** (prolonged anxiety after a traumatic event); and
- **Generalised anxiety** (an inexplicable feeling of apprehension that may last for months).

Anxiety disorders can vary greatly in their severity, they may be mild or completely debilitating. The incidence of the different disorders also varies: Phobias, panic attacks, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, for example, occur less frequently than generalised anxiety (which afflicts twice as many women as men). The disorders usually become noticeable during the teen years or early adulthood and are considerably more common among adults than children.

Some anxieties are very difficult to treat; others respond well to medications, psychotherapy, and alternative therapies.

What does not work is self-treatment with alcohol or recreational drugs to alleviate the symptoms. Many sufferers choose this path, but ultimately it will only make the condition worse.

CAUSES

Anxiety can be caused by a recognisable stress such as a bad accident, a death, or the loss of something important to us... In such cases, adjustments to the situation, along with the passage of time, will have a healing effect. In other cases, the stress is invisible a buried memory of some unhappy or frightening event in childhood, lurking below the surface of the conscious mind and revealing its presence in anxiety.

Hereditary factors may play a role in some individuals becoming prone to anxiety. Food sensitivities and allergies may also contribute to anxiety, although more research must be done to certify this connection. In addition, anxiety frequently follows a sudden withdrawal from alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. The first step is to ensure the stress symptoms are not the result of another disease or disorder. Check with your Medical Practitioner.

Traditional Treatment

Anxiety can be treated with conventional medications, psychotherapy, and many alternative approaches. Psychotherapy aims at identifying conflicts and other stresses that may lie at the roots of anxiety. Behaviour modification, a therapy that concentrates on changing patterns of behaviour can help the patient with coping with anxiety, as can cognitive therapy, which concentrates on changing ways of thinking and mental processes.

Medication is useful for alleviating the symptoms of anxiety and is often prescribed in conjunction with other therapies.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

Many alternative practices and treatments can relieve the symptoms of anxiety. Meditation, exercise (especially aerobic exercise), and relaxation techniques are among the most effective.

Chinese medicine uses various herbal preparations that can serve as a tonic for the whole system and reduce stress.

Taking regular massages will be extremely beneficial as it relaxes the whole body and mind.

Other popular choices to reduce anxiety are...

- **Aromatherapy** - Bergamot (in a burner or massage), Lavender (Massage, burner or bath), Neroli (massage), Vetiver (burner), Ylang Ylang (massage, bath or burner)
- **Bach Flower Remedies** - Agrimony helps if you hide your worry behind a 'happy face', white chestnut leads to insomnia and is needed if you continually have mental arguments with yourself and unwanted thoughts - you may find it hard to concentrate on you daily happenings because of this worry. If you are over protective of your family, worry incessantly about what could happen to them and friends (to the point of making them concerned about these imagined happenings) you could take red chestnut. If you are worried about justice and fairness happening and are over-involved in causes etc - try vervain.
- **Herbal therapies** - You may be recommended to astragalus, bilberry, catnip, hops, kava, passionflower, peppermint, valerian, lemon balm, motherwort (if anxiety occurs with palpitations), skullcap, yarrow. There are also various herbal formulas available and it is strongly advisable to consult with a qualified herbalist or naturopath for assistance.
- **Homoeopathy** - If the anxiety is the result of a sudden shock, try Aconite. Ignatia it is the "grief remedy," said to benefit someone who is upset by a sudden loss. Gelsemium is recommended for stage fright or anxiety over your performance. If none of these prove effective, Ask for professional advice.
- **Mind/body medicine** - such as meditation, Tai Chi and relaxation exercises. Daily exercise can be very helpful and enjoyable
- Magnesium supplements may be helpful, especially if you suffer from muscle spasms. Be careful with the amounts that you take.
- Avoid alcohol, and reduce or eliminate your consumption of sugar and caffeine.
- Try to avoid activities you do not enjoy or find relaxing and pursue activities that you do enjoy.

Dietary Considerations

Try to sustain a healthy mix of fresh fruit and vegetables, low-fat diet with plenty of filtered water and exercise.

When to seek further professional advice

- If your anxiety seems more extreme than the situation warrants.
- If your anxiety inhibits normal activities.
- Your anxiety persists for many weeks.
- Your symptoms suddenly become severe or uncontrollable. You may be experiencing a panic attack.