

What is an Anxiety Disorder?

An Anxiety Disorder may be present when a person has feelings of nervousness or fear that interfere with their social, school or work life. The person usually tries to cope by avoiding situations in which they will feel anxious. There are many different Anxiety Disorders. The most common ones for adults are listed below.

- **Panic Disorder** – having panic attacks that come without warning. A panic attack is a sudden onset of strong anxiety. It includes sensations such as increased heart rate, shortness of breath, and sweating. The person is fearful of having more attacks and is anxious about the physical symptoms of anxiety.
- **Agoraphobia** – fear of being in places like the shopping mall or outside alone. The person is afraid that escape may be difficult or embarrassing or that they may not be able to get help if a panic attack happens there.
- **Specific Phobia** – fear of a specific thing such as spiders or heights.
- **Social Phobia** – fear of being embarrassed in public and having to carry out simple tasks in front of others.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** – having obsessions or compulsions. An obsession is a repeated and unwanted thought that causes high anxiety. A compulsion is a repeated action such as checking, counting, or washing because of an obsessive thought.
- **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** – the person has had a traumatic event and has problems coping. Symptoms may include nightmares, flashbacks, avoiding reminders of the trauma, and increased emotional reactions.
- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** – having worry and fear about a number of things almost every day for many months.

How long does it last?

How long it lasts depends on a number of things, including the type of Anxiety Disorder the person has. The disorder can be treated but may return in the future, especially when there is high stress.

How common is it?

As many as 3 people in 10 will have an Anxiety Disorder in their lifetime.

How is it treated?

It is first important to rule out medical causes such as a thyroid problem, heart condition, or drug reaction.

Hospital

People with an Anxiety Disorder do not usually need to stay in hospital.

Medication

Medication may be prescribed. This may include quick acting anxiety drugs that are taken short-term or on an as needed basis. It usually includes longer-term treatment with antidepressants that also help with anxiety. Other drugs may be added to help with specific symptoms such as sleep problems. Even when medication is the only treatment, it is important for the person to try to face their fears to assist in recovery.

Psychotherapy

Cognitive behaviour therapy is about as effective as medication for reducing anxiety symptoms. This is an active treatment that usually involves facing fears and working on beliefs. It may also help to reduce relapse.

Many cities have self-help groups for people with Anxiety Disorders. These offer support and education.

Other Related Problems

Many people who have an Anxiety Disorder also have another mental health condition. This includes Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Personality Disorder, and Substance Abuse.

What do families need to know?

The symptoms usually improve with medication or psychotherapy. It is usually important for the person to face their fears. If family members always help the person to avoid their fears (e.g. going to the store for them) they may be adding to the problem more than they are helping. This may also prevent the person from seeking treatment.

Where can I get more information?

You can ask your Family Doctor, Psychiatrist, or Mental Health Professional if you have more questions. Also, your Pharmacist may be able to answer questions about your medication.

Other Contacts

- Mobile Crisis of Peel
905-278-9036
- Mobile Crisis Team for North York and Etobicoke
416-498-0043
- Canadian Mental Health Association
www.cmha.ca
- Mental Health Service Information Ontario
www.mhsio.on.ca
- Drug & Alcohol Registry of Treatment
www.dart.on.ca
- Telecare Distress Centre
905-459-7777
- Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada
www.anxietycanada.ca

William Osler Health Centre
Mental Health & Addictions Program

Etobicoke General Hospital, 101 Humber College Blvd., Etobicoke ON
Peel Memorial Hospital (under redevelopment)
Brampton Civic Hospital, 2100 Bovaird Drive East, Brampton ON

www.williamoslerhc.on.ca
416-494-2120 or 905-494-2120

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