

## Are You Experiencing Problems with Anxiety?

Anxiety is an emotion that includes feelings of dread and unease that stress your body and mind. It's a feeling of worry, worry of something that probably won't happen, but you can't stop thinking that it will.

You worry that you're going to fail out of school. You worry that you'll lose your job and then your house. Or worse yet, it's a worry that someone's going to die: your parent, your child, or maybe even you.

What do you do when you're anxious? Do you pace the room like an agitated tiger in its cage? Do you close the curtains and lock all the windows and doors but are still convinced someone can get in? Or do you try to medicate the feeling away? Do you use beer, wine, or pot to try and make the angst fade?

### The Difference between Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are different emotions. Fear is an emotion that focuses on a threat that exists in the present. The threat is perceived by your senses and is real. It evokes in you a response of fighting or running away. Examples of things that evoke fear in you might include a large, angry dog snapping at you with its teeth, a fire in your house, or someone coming closer to hurt you.

Anxiety is an emotion that arises in response to some threat that you perceive in the future. This threat may be real— you're anxious that you may fail a test because you didn't study. Or the threat may be imagined—you will gain 25 pounds because you ate one piece of cake. When you have anxiety, there is no immediate threat that you have to fight or escape from to protect yourself. There is nothing in the present that is going to hurt you.

### When Should You Be Concerned About Your Anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety. Competing in a game, taking a test, even asking someone out on a date for the first time can all cause anxiety. In each of these cases, the anxiety is caused by an event in the future. Once the event occurs, the anxiety melts away.

One sign of abnormal anxiety is that your worry is a reaction not to one certain identifiable event, like a test, but is a reaction to nonspecific threats. Nonspecific means you are not focusing on a single threat, but switching between threats.

Another sign of abnormal anxiety is if your worry about these nonspecific treats is excessive and irrational. For instance, you experience disturbing worries that you have cancer, even though there are no symptoms; that your that your boss is going to fire you even though you just got employ of the month; and you fear falling into poverty even though you are fiscally sound and responsible.

If you have anxiety like that described above, you may have a **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**. About 6.8 million people in America experience a GAD each year. GAD is treatable. Contact a mental health professional if you think you are experiencing GAD.

### Other Anxiety Problems

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** is a condition where a person has intrusive thoughts that produce fears and worries (obsessions) over such things as contamination, running someone over and killing them, or that the door isn't locked. His mind becomes so

obsesses with these fears, that he is compelled to perform certain behaviors (compulsions) to ease the obsessive thoughts.

His compulsions for the obsessions mentioned above may include repeatedly washing his hands and refusing to use public restrooms to ease his obsession of contamination. While driving, he may obsess that he ran someone over and be compelled to turn the car around and backtrack to look for the body. When going out, he may return to the door of his dwelling and test the lock over and over again.

OCD can severely impact your life. If left untreated, the compulsive rituals become more frequent. Due to these compulsions you may find yourself arriving late for appointments or work. If done in public, you face the embarrassment of people watching you and even laughing.

But OCD is treatable and can be controlled with medication and therapy. You don't have to be a prisoner to obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors. Talk to a mental health professional and get the help you need.

## **Panic Disorder**

If you experience severe reoccurring panic attacks when there is no source of danger present, you may have **Panic Disorder**. If you have panic disorder you may have ongoing worry about when the next attack is going to occur. When a panic attack is going to occur is unpredictable leading to stress, anxiety and worry about you will experience the next attack.

A panic attack consists of several severe physical symptoms that include a racing heart and pounding in your chest. You might find you can't catch your breath, which leads to feeling lightheaded or like you're going to faint. The

panic may make you want to run away, but you find that you are frozen on the spot. It is common to think you're having a heart attack or are dying.

About 6 million people experience panic disorder in a given year. Women are twice as likely as men to have panic disorder. Panic disorder can be treated with medication and therapy. If you are experiencing reoccurring panic attacks, seek the help of a mental health professional.

## **Resources**

Anxiety and Depression Association of America for Anxiety Disorders  
<http://www.adaa.org/>

Web MD for Anxiety Disorders  
<http://www.webmd.com/anxiety-panic/guide/mental-health-anxiety-disorders>

OCD Foundation  
<http://www.ocfoundation.org/whatisocd.aspx>

Mayo Clinic for OCD  
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ocd/basics/definition/con-20027827>

Web MD for Panic Disorder  
<http://www.webmd.com/anxiety-panic/guide/mental-health-panic-disorder>

Anxiety and Depression Association of America for Panic Disorder  
<http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/panic-disorder-agoraphobia>

## **For help with anxiety problem you may be facing, contact:**

Kim Keuter LCSW-R  
607.206.8262

Fact sheet written by Neil Eldred, Freelance Writer  
[www.neileldred.com](http://www.neileldred.com) or 607.821.9717