

ANXIETY DISORDERS PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Practice Guidelines: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)/ Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)

[Psychological and pharmacological treatments for adults with posttraumatic stress disorder: A systematic review update \(2018\)](#)

American Psychiatric Association (APA)

- [Practice guideline for the treatment of patients with panic disorder \(2009\)](#)
- [Practice guideline for the treatment of patients with obsessive compulsive disorder \(2007 with 2013 guideline watch\)](#)

The British Association for Psychopharmacology (BAP)

- [Evidence-based pharmacological treatment of anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder \(2014\)](#)

Canadian Psychiatric Association

- [Management of anxiety disorders \(2006\)](#)

The International Psychopharmacology Algorithm Project (IPAP)

- [Generalized anxiety disorder \(GAD\) algorithm \(2010\)](#)

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)

- [Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: management \(2011\)](#)
- [Social anxiety disorder: recognition, assessment, and treatment \(2013\)](#)
- [Obsessive-compulsive disorder and body dysmorphic disorder: treatment \(2005\)](#)

Screening Tools, Fact Sheets, Additional Resources:

[NAMI Fact Sheet for Anxiety Disorders:](#)

GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder) is a 7-question screening tool that identifies whether a complete assessment for anxiety is indicated.

[Fact Sheet for Anxiety](#)

[Resilience Facts Sheet](#)

[Practice parameter for the assessment and treatment of children and adolescents with anxiety disorders \(PDF\)](#) (Revised: 2/2007) - American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

[Drugs for the Treatment of Long Term Anxiety](#)

Brief Overview - Anxiety Disorders: Excerpted from NAMI

We all experience anxiety. For example, speaking in front of a group can make us anxious, but that anxiety also motivates us to prepare and practice. Driving in heavy traffic is another common source of anxiety, but it helps keep us alert and cautious to avoid accidents. However, when feelings of intense fear and distress become overwhelming and prevent us from doing everyday activities, an anxiety disorder may be the cause.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern in the United States. An estimated 40 million adults in the U.S. (18%) have an anxiety disorder. Meanwhile, approximately 8% of children and teenagers experience an anxiety disorder. Most people develop symptoms before age 21.

Symptoms

Anxiety disorders are a group of related conditions, each having unique symptoms. However, all anxiety disorders have one thing in common: persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening. People typically experience one or more of the following symptoms:

Emotional symptoms:

- Feelings of apprehension or dread
- Feeling tense or jumpy
- Restlessness or irritability
- Anticipating the worst and being watchful for signs of danger

Physical symptoms:

- Pounding or racing heart and shortness of breath
- Sweating, tremors and twitches
- Headaches, fatigue and insomnia
- Upset stomach, frequent urination or diarrhea

Types of Anxiety Disorders

There are many types of anxiety disorders, each with different symptoms. The most common types of anxiety disorders include:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

GAD produces chronic, exaggerated worrying about everyday life. This worrying can consume hours each day, making it hard to concentrate or finish daily tasks. A person with GAD may become exhausted by worry and experience headaches, tension or nausea.

Social Anxiety Disorder

More than shyness, this disorder causes intense fear about social interaction, often driven by irrational worries about humiliation (e.g. saying something stupid or not knowing what to say). Someone with social anxiety disorder may not take part in conversations, contribute to class discussions or offer their ideas, and may become isolated. Panic attacks are a common reaction to anticipated or forced social interaction.

Panic Disorder

This disorder is characterized by panic attacks and sudden feelings of terror sometimes striking repeatedly and without warning. Often mistaken for a heart attack, a panic attack causes powerful physical symptoms including chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath and stomach upset. Many people will go to desperate measures to avoid an attack, including social isolation.

Phobias

We all tend to avoid certain things or situations that make us uncomfortable or even fearful. But for someone with a phobia, certain places, events or objects create powerful reactions of strong, irrational fear. Most people with specific phobias have several things that can trigger those reactions; to avoid panic, they will work hard to avoid their triggers. Depending on the type and number of triggers, attempts to control fear can take over a person's life.

Other anxiety disorders include:

- Agoraphobia
- Selective mutism
- Separation anxiety disorder
- Substance/medication-induced anxiety disorder, involving intoxication or withdrawal or medication treatment

Causes

Scientists believe that many factors combine to cause anxiety disorders:

- **Genetics.** Studies support the evidence that anxiety disorders “run in families,” as some families have a higher-than-average amount of anxiety disorders among relatives.
- **Environment.** A stressful or traumatic event such as abuse, death of a loved one, violence or prolonged illness is often linked to the development of an anxiety disorder.

Diagnosis

Physical symptoms of an anxiety disorder can be easily confused with other medical conditions, like heart disease or hyperthyroidism. Therefore, a doctor will likely perform an evaluation involving a physical examination, an interview and lab tests. After ruling out an underlying physical illness, a doctor may refer a person to a mental health professional for evaluation. Using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) a mental health professional is able to identify the specific type of anxiety disorder causing symptoms as well as any other possible disorders that may be involved. Tackling all disorders through comprehensive treatment is the best recovery strategy.

Treatment

Different anxiety disorders have their own distinct sets of symptoms. This means that each type of anxiety disorder also has its own treatment plan. But there are common types of treatment that are used. Please visit our [Anxiety Treatment](#) page for more in-depth information on the following methods:

- [Psychotherapy](#), including cognitive behavioral therapy
- [Medications](#), including antianxiety medications and antidepressants
 - [See: Evidence-based pharmacological treatment of anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder \(2014\)](#)
- [Complementary health approaches](#), including stress and relaxation techniques

Adolescents and Anxiety:

[https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(09\)61838-4/fulltext](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(09)61838-4/fulltext)

How common are anxiety disorders in children?

Anxious feelings, worries, or fears are common among children and adolescents. Many children experience a normal amount of apprehension in certain situations, whether it is about an upcoming test at school or a thunderstorm.

Some children, however, experience these types of situations with an overwhelming sense of fear and dread. Others can't seem to stop thinking about these situations and their accompanying fears. No amount of reassurance seems to help. These children may tend to get "stuck" on their worried thoughts and have a hard time doing normal daily functions like going to school, playing, falling asleep, or trying

new things. Getting “stuck,” when it begins to interfere with daily functioning, is the key. This is what separates normal, fluctuating worries of childhood from an anxiety disorder that requires professional intervention.

All anxiety-related problems share 4 common features:

The anxiety is often an inexplicable fear or preoccupation that interferes with the child's or adolescent's ability to enjoy life or to complete daily routines or to do the things they are expected to do.

The anxiety is often as puzzling to the child as it is to his or her parents.

The anxiety does not respond to or diminish after logical explanations, since anxiety symptoms often defy logic.

The anxiety problem can be helped.

What are anxiety disorders?

There are many different types of anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety, social anxiety, separation anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, phobias, and panic. All of these disorders cause significant distress and a reduced level of functioning and competency for children and adolescents. Some common symptoms of anxiety include:

- Feeling nervous or "on edge."
- Unfounded or unrealistic fears.
- Trouble separating from parents.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors.
- Trembling, sweating, shortness of breath, stomachaches, headaches, and/or muscle tension or other physical symptoms.

Often, the child or adolescent feels these symptoms are beyond his/her control, which only adds to their concerns. Types of Anxiety Disorders

Generalized anxiety disorder is an excessive worry and/or apprehension about a number of events or activities. These feelings occur almost all the time and are not triggered by any one specific issue. Rather, the worry seems to float in a more generalized way, from one topic to the next. Some examples include: fear of failure or poor performance, worries about the child's and/or family's safety, worries about thunderstorms or wars, worries about what others will think of them, and apprehension about new situations or meeting new people.

Phobias are highly specific and exclusive fears. The child or adolescent functions normally until confronted by the dreaded object, event, or situation. Some examples include fears of bugs, fears of heights, or fear of flying in an airplane.

Separation anxiety disorder is the child or adolescent's excessive worry and apprehension about being away from their parents. Children with separation anxiety disorder often fear that their parents will be harmed in some way or will not return to them as promised. Separation anxiety disorder is often seen in preschoolers, but it is also seen in older children and adolescents in response to stressful life events.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a condition involving obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are recurrent thoughts, impulses, or images that are difficult to control and cause significant distress. Compulsions are behaviors that the child engages in (such as handwashing, checking, redoing, etc.) to make the distress feel better. Some examples of obsessive-compulsive disorder may include excessive concerns about germs or lucky/unlucky numbers.

Panic disorder is characterized by discrete and intense periods of anxiety that occur unexpectedly, without warning, and are not always linked to a specific place or situation. With panic disorder, there is often no warning, and therefore it is harder to predict when it may occur. Children with panic symptoms may experience high anxiety, have difficulty breathing, feel as if everything around them is closing in and may experience feelings of impending doom. What are the risks if I don't seek help for my child?

Not obtaining treatment can have serious negative consequences on your child's development and self-esteem. Untreated anxiety disorders can strain family relationships, impact school performance and social functioning, and lead to more serious mental and physical health problems for the child down the road

What causes anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders are caused by a combination of life events, heredity, temperament, and biochemical factors.

In some ways, anxiety disorders are like allergies: We can identify the problem easily enough, but only through a careful evaluation can the causes and circumstances that cause anxiety disorders be identified and effectively treated as well as the underlying thinking and behaviors that are fueling the anxiety.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is an intense re-experiencing of a traumatic event by distressing recollections, dreams, and/or associations (such as things or situations that remind the child or adolescent of the traumatic event). Some examples include witnessing or experiencing a natural disaster, being in a serious automobile accident, or witnessing a violent crime.