

## What are Anxiety Disorders?

An anxiety disorder is a medical condition.

Anxiety disorders include generalised anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and phobias. Common to all of these is an anxiety, so overwhelming it can interfere with a person's ability to function day-to-day.

A person may experience more than one anxiety disorder. Some may also experience depression with the anxiety, or have problems with alcohol or drug abuse.

## What are the symptoms?

A person with an anxiety disorder will feel distressed a lot of the time for no apparent reason. An episode can be so severe it is immobilising. The person might have –

- ① persistent, excessive or unrealistic worries (generalised anxiety disorder).
- ① compulsions and obsessions which they can't control (obsessive compulsive disorder).
- ① intense excessive worry about social situations (social anxiety disorder).
- ① panic attacks (panic disorder).
- ① an intense, irrational fear of everyday objects and situations (phobia).

Other symptoms of anxiety disorders may include a pounding heart; difficulty breathing; upset stomach; muscle tension; sweating or choking; feeling faint or shaky.

## What causes Anxiety Disorders?

The causes are not fully understood. It is likely that a particular anxiety disorder is a result of several interacting factors and is affected by stressful life events and personality traits.

## How many people develop Anxiety Disorders?

Every year, around 14% of all adult Australians are affected by an anxiety disorder. Women are affected more than men.

## How is anxiety treated?

Treatment can help people manage, reduce or even eliminate the symptoms associated with anxiety disorders. Diagnosis is generally made by a psychiatrist. Clinical psychologists, social workers or counsellors often manage ongoing treatment. Effective treatments include medication, cognitive behaviour therapy and community support and recover programs. During cognitive behaviour therapy, a person learns new and effective ways to cope with their symptoms. With the appropriate treatment and support, most people can deal with their symptoms successfully and get on with their lives again.

## How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have.

SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness.

For more information about this topic see:

- ① [SANE Guide to Medication and other Treatments](#)  
Explains how all the different aspects of treatment work, by looking at clinical care, medication, support in the community and helping yourself.
- ① [SANE Guide to Anxiety Disorders](#)  
Explains what these conditions are, how treatments for anxiety work, and suggests practical steps to look after yourself as well as what family and friends can do to help.

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