

What is Anxiety?

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Anx*â*·i*Â*·e*Â*·ty

n. pl. anx*â*·i*Â*·e*Â*·ties

1. A state of uneasiness and apprehension, as about future uncertainties.
2. A cause of anxiety: For some people, air travel is a real anxiety.

Psychiatry. A state of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation, often impairing physical and psychological functioning.

Anxiety disorders may develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events.

An estimated 19 million adult Americans suffer from anxiety disorders.

Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet o^Ânly about o^Âne-third of those suffering from an anxiety disorder receive treatment.

Everybody knows what it's like to feel anxious â€“ the butterflies in your stomach before a first date, the tension you feel when your boss is angry, the way your heart pounds if you're in danger. Anxiety rouses you to action. It gears you up to face a threatening situation. It makes you study harder for that exam, and keeps you o^Ân your toes when you're making a speech. In general, it helps you cope.

But if you have an anxiety disorder, this normally helpful emotion can do just the opposite â€“ it can keep you from coping and can disrupt your daily life. Anxiety disorders aren't just a case of "nerves." They are illnesses, often related to the biological makeup and life experiences of the individual, and they frequently run in families. There are several types of anxiety disorders, each with its own distinct features.

An anxiety disorder may make you feel anxious most of the time, without any apparent reason. Or the anxious feelings may be so uncomfortable that to avoid them you may stop some everyday activities. Or you may have occasional bouts of anxiety so intense they terrify and immobilize you.

Anxiety disorders are the most common of all the mental disorders. At the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the Federal agency that conducts and supports research related to mental disorders, mental health, and the brain, scientists are learning more and more about the nature of anxiety disorders, their causes, and how to alleviate them. NIMH also conducts educational outreach activities about anxiety disorders and other mental illnesses.

Many people misunderstand these disorders and think individuals should be able to overcome the symptoms by sheer willpower. Wishing the symptoms away does not work – but there are treatments that can help. These pages are meant to help you understand these conditions, describe their treatments, and explain the role of research in conquering anxiety and other mental disorders.

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