

A good diet and enough sleep are known to decrease symptoms in people with anxiety disorders. Regular exercise has also been scientifically proven to be effective.

Family and friends who have loved ones with anxiety disorders should attempt to be understanding of the symptoms that their loved one is trying to overcome. Family and friends should be careful not to blame themselves but rather to encourage their loved one to seek treatment for these complicated illnesses.

Recovery

Recovery does not mean that the illness has gone into complete remission. Over time, and after what for many can be a long and difficult process, individuals can come to terms with their illness by first learning to accept it and then moving beyond it.

This includes learning coping mechanisms, believing in themselves as individuals by learning their strengths as well as their limitations, and coming to realize that they do have the capacity to find purpose and enjoyment in their lives in spite of their illness.

RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE!

How to Get Help

No insurance? Call the NAMI Southern Arizona office to talk to an advocate who can provide guidance and help you access mental health services.

If you have anxiety:

- ◆ Seek medical care through a psychiatrist and/or your primary care physician.
- ◆ Find the right combination of treatment that works for you which may include medication, therapy, support groups, etc.

**Sometimes people must try several different treatments or combinations of treatment before they find the one that works for them.*

- ◆ Take NAMI's Peer-to-Peer course and/or join the NAMI Connection support group.
- ◆ LEARN about your illness. The more you know, the more you are able to help yourself. Start with NAMI today!

If you are a family member with a loved one who has mental illness:

- ◆ Take care of yourself.
- ◆ Take NAMI's Family-to-Family course, join a Family & Friends Support Group and/or take NAMI Basics if you have a loved one who is a child or adolescent.
- ◆ Family, friends and partners of military service members and veterans can take NAMI's Homefront course.
- ◆ Learn about your loved one's illness.

SHOW YOU CARE. WEAR A SILVER RIBBON.



- Help break down the barriers to treatment and support.
- Help reduce stigma —talk about it!



**FIND HELP.
FIND HOPE.**

Mental illness affects 1 in 5 people. We provide resources and support to all those affected by mental illness.

**NAMI SOUTHERN ARIZONA DEPENDS ON YOU.
THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO HELP.
BECOME A MEMBER, VOLUNTEER OR DONATE.**

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ANXIETY DISORDERS

Educational information and local support provided by:



What are anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders are a group of mental illnesses that cause people to feel excessively frightened, distressed, or uneasy during situations in which most other people would not experience these same feelings. When they are not treated, anxiety disorders can be severely impairing. This can negatively affect one's personal relationships or ability to work, study, or perform daily activities such as shopping, cooking or going outside.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in America: they affect around 20 percent of the population at any given time. Fortunately there are many good treatments for anxiety disorders. Unfortunately, some people do not seek treatment for their illness because they do not realize how severe their symptoms are or are too ashamed to seek help.

What are the most common anxiety disorders?

- ◆ Panic Disorder – Characterized by “panic attacks,” panic disorder results in sudden feelings of terror that can strike repeatedly and sometimes without warning. Physical symptoms of a panic attack include chest pain, heart palpitations, upset stomach, feelings of being disconnected and fear of dying.
- ◆ Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD) – OCD is characterized by repetitive, intrusive, irrational and unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and/or rituals that seem impossible to control

(compulsions). Some people with OCD have specific compulsions (e.g., counting, arranging, cleaning) that they “must perform” multiple times each day in order to momentarily release their anxiety that something bad might happen to themselves or to someone they love.

- ◆ Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – When people experience or witness a traumatic event such as abuse, a natural disaster, or extreme violence, it is normal to be distressed and to feel “on edge” for some time after this experience. Some people who experience traumatic events have severe symptoms such as nightmares or flashbacks. They may be easily startled or scared or feel numb/angry/irritable. Symptoms may last for weeks or even months after the event and are so severe that they make it difficult for a person to work, have loving relationships, or “return to normal.”
- ◆ Phobias – A phobia is a disabling and irrational fear of something that really poses little or no actual danger for most people. This fear can be very disabling when it leads to avoidance of objects or situations that may cause extreme feelings of terror, dread and panic.
- ◆ Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) – A severe, chronic, exaggerated worrying about everyday events is the most common symptom in people with GAD. This is a worrying that lasts for at least six months and makes it difficult to concentrate and to carry out routine activities. This worrying happens for many hours each day in some people.

- ◆ Social Anxiety Disorder – An intense fear of social situations that leads to difficulties with personal relationships and at the workplace or in school is most common in people with social anxiety disorder. Individuals with social anxiety disorder often have an irrational fear of being humiliated in public for “saying something stupid” or “not knowing what to say.”

Other recognized anxiety disorders include:

Some people with other mental illnesses, such as depression or schizophrenia, may have symptoms of severe anxiety. These symptoms of worrying, panic attacks or compulsions may make treating their primary illness more complicated for mental health professionals. Therefore, complete treatment of depression or schizophrenia often requires treatment of anxiety symptoms.

People with anxiety disorders are more likely to use or abuse alcohol and other drugs including benzodiazepines, opiates (e.g., pain-killers, heroin) or cigarettes. This is known as self-medication. Some people use drugs and alcohol to try to reduce their anxiety. This is very dangerous because even though some drugs make people feel less anxious when they are high, anxiety becomes even worse when the drugs wear off.

Are there any known causes of anxiety disorders?

Although studies suggest that people are more likely to have an anxiety disorder if their parents have anxiety disorders, it has

not been shown whether biology or environment plays the greater role in the development of these disorders. Some anxiety disorders have a very clear genetic link (e.g., OCD) that is being studied by scientists to help discover new treatments to target specific parts of the brain.

Some anxiety disorders can also be caused by medical illnesses. Other anxiety disorders can be caused by brain injury.

The sudden appearance of severe anxiety symptoms in a person of any age requires immediate attention by both caregivers and doctors. Parents and friends should be aware that a traumatic event may be causing their loved one to become more nervous or to have other symptoms of anxiety disorders. Doctors should be aware that many medical problems including hormonal and neurological illnesses can cause symptoms of anxiety.

What treatments are available for anxiety disorders?

Effective treatments for anxiety disorders include medications and psychotherapy. Psychotherapy techniques such as cognitive behavioral therapies are most useful in the treatment of anxiety disorders and are referred to as “first-line treatments.”

In most cases, a combination of psychotherapy and medications is most beneficial for people with severe anxiety disorders. Some commonly used medications for anxiety disorders are antidepressant medications called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).