

Women and Anxiety



U.S. FOOD & DRUG
ADMINISTRATION

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or fear about an event or situation. It is a normal reaction to stress. Anxiety can help you stay alert for a challenging situation at work, study harder for an exam, or remain focused on an important speech. In general, it helps you cope. When it becomes hard to control and affects your day-to-day life, it can be disabling.

What is an anxiety disorder?

Anxiety disorders happen when excessive anxiety interferes with your everyday activities such as going to work or school or spending time with friends or family. Anxiety disorders are serious mental illnesses.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders in the United States. They affect up to 40 million American adults each year. Women are more than twice as likely as men to develop an anxiety disorder in their lifetime. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet less than 37% of those suffering are treated.

What are the major types of anxiety disorders?

There are several major types of anxiety disorders. They all have their own traits and impact people in distinct ways.

- **Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)** causes excessive worry about regular aspects of life, like family or income. It can happen daily and make it hard to get through the day or sleep at night. GAD and major depression often occur together.
- **Panic disorder** involves frequent and sudden panic attacks, which are unexpected feelings of terror that happen without warning. Panic attacks can occur when there is no direct danger.
- **Phobias** are a strong fear of something of little to no threat. This can include traveling by air or being around a large group of people.

What are the symptoms of anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders come with a mix of symptoms. They can vary by person and the type of anxiety disorder you have. Symptoms can also impact how you live and spend time with others.

There are many symptoms of anxiety. The symptoms below are shared across several types of anxiety disorders:

- Anxious thoughts or beliefs
- Feelings of fear and dread
- Physical symptoms like a fast heartbeat or nausea
- Changes in behavior like avoiding previous normal activities

What causes anxiety disorders?

Several factors can increase the risk of developing an anxiety disorder. They can vary from one woman to another. A few common risk factors include:

- Traumatic events in childhood or adulthood
- Hormonal changes during one's menstrual cycle
- A family history of anxiety or other mental disorders

What are common treatment options?

For some people, treatment can help ease anxiety symptoms. There are several types of treatments for anxiety available to help you manage your symptoms every day, such as:

- **Counseling (psychotherapy or talk therapy)**
This form of treatment includes talking with a trained mental health professional. Together, you can work through managing your anxiety.
- **Medicine**
Medicine does not cure anxiety disorders but can help relieve symptoms. Health care providers can prescribe medicines for anxiety. The most common classes of medicines used to combat anxiety disorders are antidepressants, anti-anxiety medicines (such as benzodiazepines), and beta-blockers.

Talk with your health care provider to find out what treatment is right for you. You should also talk with your provider about the risks, benefits, and side effects before you start or stop a medical treatment.

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How does my physical health affect my mental health?

People who are not physically healthy may have trouble staying mentally healthy. People living with chronic (long-term) health problems such as diabetes or heart disease are often more likely to have higher levels of stress and anxiety. Having a chronic disease does not always mean you will have a mental health condition like an anxiety disorder, but if you are struggling with both, know that you are not alone. Support groups and health care professionals can help. Healthy eating and other healthy habits, like exercise, yoga, or meditation can help improve physical health and reduce anxiety.

What should you do if you think you have an anxiety disorder?

Set up a visit to see a health care provider.

At this visit, your primary care doctor will conduct an initial mental health screening. From there, they can refer you to a mental health specialist.

Get involved in your care. Be open about your symptoms and listen to your options. Give your input on the options you feel could be a good fit for you.

Turn to people you trust for support. As you navigate life with an anxiety disorder, it helps to have people in your life that you trust. Find friends and support groups that you know will listen to your concerns and help you through tough times.

Call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 if you have immediate concerns about your mental health.

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, and prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones in the United States. **Call 911** if you or someone you know is in immediate danger or go to the nearest emergency room.

What do you need to know about anxiety disorders and pregnancy?

If you are thinking about becoming pregnant, are pregnant, or are breastfeeding, you should talk with your health care provider about any medicines you may take for anxiety. Some medicines can affect your unborn baby, but untreated mental health conditions can also affect an unborn baby. Some medicines may also pass to your baby through breast milk. Talk with your provider about what treatments are safe for you and your baby.

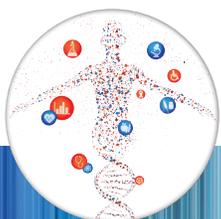
During pregnancy or as a new mother, you may feel overwhelmed at times. Mental health support and resources are available through the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline. It is free, confidential, and available 24/7. Call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262).

Talk with your health care provider about all medical treatment options. Discuss their risks and benefits. Your provider can answer all your questions Together, you can decide which treatment is right for you.

This fact sheet was developed by the FDA Office of Women's Health. This information is for educational purposes, not all inclusive, and should not be used in place of talking with your health care provider.

To learn more about women and anxiety, go to:

www.fda.gov/womens



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