



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A vague, uncomfortable feeling of fear, dread or danger from an unknown source. For some it may be an acute episode, while other persons become constantly anxious. Several types of anxiety are recognized: Acute situational anxiety, adjustment disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Feeling that something undesirable or harmful is about to happen.
- Dry mouth; swallowing difficulty or hoarseness.
- Rapid breathing and heartbeat, palpitations.
- Twitching or trembling.
- Muscle tension; headaches; backache.
- Sweating.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Dizziness or faintness.
- Nausea; diarrhea; weight loss.
- Sleeplessness.
- Irritability.
- Fatigue.
- Nightmares.
- Memory problems.
- Sexual impotence.

### CAUSES

Activation of the body's defense mechanisms for fight or flight. Excess adrenalin is discharged from the adrenal glands, and adrenalin breakdown products (catecholamines) eventually affect various parts of the body. Attempts to avoid the anxiety lead to more anxiety.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress from any source (such as social or financial problems).
- Family history of anxiety.
- Fatigue or overwork.
- Recurrence of situations that have been previously stressful or harmful.
- Medical illness.
- Unrealistic perfectionism.
- Withdrawal from drugs or alcohol.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Practice relaxation techniques or meditation.
- Consider lifestyle changes to reduce stress.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Generalized anxiety can be controlled with treatment. Overcoming anxiety often results in a richer, more satisfying life.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Impaired social and occupational functioning.
- A sudden increase in anxiety may lead to panic and violent escape behavior.
- Dependence on drugs.
- Heart arrhythmias.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Obtain therapy to understand the specific but unconscious threat or source of stress.
- Learn techniques, including biofeedback and relaxation therapy, to reduce muscle tension.
- Follow a regular fitness routine using aerobic exercise.
- For additional information, contact Anxiety Disorders Association of America, 6000 Executive Blvd., Suite 513, Rockville, MD 20852; (301) 231-9350

### MEDICATIONS

- Antianxiety drugs such as benzodiazepines may be prescribed on a short-term basis.
- Antidepressants may be prescribed for panic disorders.

### ACTIVITY

Stay active. Physical exertion helps reduce anxiety.

### DIET

No special diet. Avoid caffeine and other stimulants, as well as alcohol.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of anxiety and self-treatment has failed.
- You have a sudden feeling of panic.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.