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Notes: **Nurses can write personalized notes to patients here.**

Anxiety Disorders

(Chronic Free-Floating Anxiety)

Definition

Anxiety is a state of dread, tension, and unease. It is considered a normal response to stress or uncertain situations. Feeling anxious for long periods of time or at intense levels may mean that you have an anxiety disorder. You may be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder if the anxiety:

- Occurs without an external threat (called "free-floating" anxiety)
- Is excessive or unreasonable for the situation or threat
- Negatively affects how you function during the day

The most common types of anxiety disorders are:

- [Specific phobias](#)
- [Post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD)
- [Panic disorder](#)
- [Obsessive-compulsive disorder](#) (OCD)
- [Social anxiety disorder](#)
- [Generalized anxiety disorder](#)

Anxiety may occur with other conditions such as [alcohol use disorder](#), [drug abuse](#), or [depression](#).

Causes

Anxiety disorders may result from a combination of factors such as:

- Genetics
- Factors in the environment

Chemical imbalances in the brain may also play a role.

Risk Factors

Anxiety disorders are nearly twice as common in women than in men. Other factors that may increase your chances of anxiety disorders:

- Family member with anxiety disorders
- Stressful life events
- Poor coping strategies
- History of physical or psychological trauma
- Chronic medical illness
- Substance abuse
- History of self-harm as a teenager, with or without suicidal intent

Symptoms

Psychological symptoms may include:

- Worry or dread
- Intrusive or ruminative thoughts
- Sense of imminent danger or catastrophe
- Fear or panic
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Impatience
- Uncertainty
- Trouble concentrating

Physical symptoms may include:

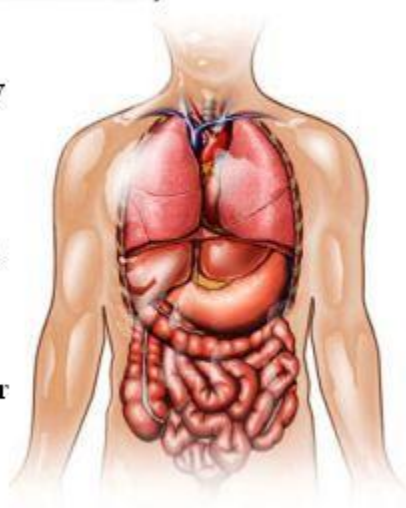
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Chest pain
- Rapid heartbeat
- Sweating (especially the palms)
- Dry mouth
- Flushing or blushing
- Muscle tension
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling lightheaded or fainting
- Difficulty sleeping
- Shaking
- Choking sensation
- Abdominal discomfort
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Feeling of "butterflies" in the stomach
- Sexual difficulties
- Tingling sensations
- Nail biting or other habitual behavior

Symptoms of Anxiety

Effects of Anxiety

Physiological effects of Anxiety

- Fear
- Breathlessness
- Choking sensation
- Heart Palpitations
- Restlessness
- Increased muscular tension



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Diagnosis

You will be asked about your symptoms and medical history. A physical and psychiatric exam will be done. Conditions with similar symptoms will be evaluated. Blood and urine tests may be done.

Your doctor will ask questions about your:

- Use of alcohol and drugs
- Mental health history
- Family's mental health history

You may be referred to a psychotherapist for further evaluation.

Treatment

Effective treatment usually involves a combination of interventions, including:

Lifestyle Changes

- Get sufficient rest and sleep.
- If you smoke, talk to your doctor about ways to [quit](#).
- Reduce or eliminate caffeinated beverages.
- Excess alcohol use can make anxiety worse—drink alcohol in moderation.
- Avoid using drugs.
- Reduce exposure to stressful environments.
- [Exercise regularly](#).

Relaxation Techniques

- Practice deep breathing and [meditation](#).
- Learn how to do progressive muscle relaxation.
- Work with a massage therapist.
- Engage in pleasurable activities.

- Do [yoga](#).

Social Support

- Have a strong support system of family and friends.
- Seek therapy to improve your coping skills.
- Join a [support group](#).

Psychotherapy

This therapy addresses thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that play a role in anxiety. It helps you work through traumas and conflicts.

[Cognitive-behavioral therapy](#) (CBT) can help you identify negative thought patterns and behaviors. Over time, you can learn to retrain your thinking. This will help you respond better to stress and anxiety.

CBT has been very effective in children and teens.

Medication

For severe anxiety or anxiety disorder, medications may include:

- Antidepressants, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and tricyclic antidepressants
- Buspirone
- Benzodiazepines

Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of these medications. Some types may cause dependence.

[Prevention](#)

To help reduce your chances of anxiety:

- Be aware of situations, occupations, and people that cause you stress.
- If unavoidable, confront and overcome situations that provoke anxiety.
- Find a relaxation technique that works for you. Use it regularly.
- Develop and maintain a strong social support system.
- Express your emotions when they happen.
- Challenge irrational beliefs and thoughts that are not helpful to you.
- Correct misperceptions. Ask others for their points of view.
- Work with a therapist.
- Avoid using nicotine or other drugs. If you drink alcohol, drink only in moderation. Moderation is 1 drink or less per day for women and 2 drinks or less per day for men.

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