

# The most common anxiety disorders, explained

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Sometimes an anxiety disorder feels like worry and ruminating about lots

of little and big things.

Other times it's focused on a specific phobia, such as a fear of flying or being in social situations. It can also be expressed as intense feelings about separation from loved ones.

What's clear is that someone experiencing anxiety disorder symptoms isn't alone. About 40 million American adults have one or more types of [anxiety disorders](#), according to the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) (ADAA).

If you think you may be among those dealing with these issues, it is possible to get help. There are a range of treatment options for anxiety disorders.

## **A common experience**

The pandemic exacerbated anxiety issues, which led the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force to [recommend](#) screenings for all adults under the age of 65.

"COVID has taken a tremendous toll on the mental health of Americans," panel member [Lori Pbert](#), a [clinical psychologist](#) and professor at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, said when the [screening recommendations were changed](#). "This is a topic prioritized for its public health importance, but clearly there's an increased focus on [mental health](#) in this country over the past few years."

Anxiety disorders are so common that nearly 30% of adults will experience one at some point in their lives, according to the [American Psychiatric Association](#) (APA).

While anxiety itself is a normal reaction to stress, the feelings involved

in anxiety disorders are excessive in relation to the circumstances.

More women than men have these conditions, according to the APA. Only about 43% of people who have generalized anxiety disorder are receiving treatment, according to the [ADAA](#).

Here is a breakdown of the most common types of anxiety disorder.

## **Generalized anxiety disorder**

Persistent anxious feelings can interfere with daily life over months and years, according to the [U.S. National Institute of Mental Health](#) (NIMH).

You might be restless, irritable, have trouble concentrating or find it hard to control your worries. Physical symptoms can include fatigue, headaches, muscle aches, stomachaches or trouble sleeping, according to the NIMH.

The worries can be about everyday issues, including job responsibilities and family health, according to the APA.

## **Social anxiety disorder**

Someone might experience [intense fear](#) about [social situations](#), causing them to avoid taking part in events or gatherings, according to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI).

It can be driven by irrational worries about humiliation, according to NAMI.

Symptoms can include blushing, sweating, trembling, a pounding heart, stomachaches, difficulty making eye contact, rigid body posture and

feelings of self-consciousness, according to the NIMH.

## **Separation anxiety disorder**

This can come with fears of being separated from those you love or worry that harm will come to them, according to the [NIMH](#). The feelings are greater than what would be expected for a person's age, according to the APA.

Symptoms can include nightmares.

## **Panic disorder**

This can include [panic attacks](#), according to the NIMH, with a racing or pounding heart, chest pain, trembling, feeling of impending doom, tingling or sweating. Some may fear dying, feel they are choking or experience shortness of breath, according to the [APA](#).

This can happen multiple times throughout the day or only a few times a year, according to the NIMH.

Not everyone who has a panic attack has a [panic disorder](#), the NIMH noted.

## **Phobias**

These can include a fear of flying, heights, injections, blood and certain animals, such as spiders or snakes.

People with phobia-related disorders or specific phobias have an intense fear about these particular objects or situations that are out of proportion with their actual danger, according to the [NIMH](#).

Someone might avoid their fear or experience immediate intense anxiety when they do encounter it.

Agoraphobia is the fear of a particular situation that the person feels may be difficult to escape, according to the [APA](#). Commonly, this can include fear of being in open or enclosed spaces, being in a crowd, using public transportation or even just being outside the home.

Symptoms can include avoidance of the situation or needing a companion to endure it.

## **Anxiety disorder treatment**

Several different types of treatments are commonly used to treat anxiety disorders.

Most will respond well to a type of talk therapy called [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) (CBT) or to anxiety medication, either used together or separately.

CBT can help someone learn a new way of thinking that may include exposure to a specific [fear](#).

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is a newer alternative that uses mindfulness and goal setting to reduce these negative feelings, the [NIMH](#) said.

Anxiety disorder medications include a range of anti-anxiety drugs and antidepressants that can balance brain chemicals, such as benzodiazepines, atypical antidepressants and beta blockers.

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