

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

# LIVING WITH ANXIETY

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# AT A GLANCE

- People with anxiety disorders experience high levels of worry or fear. These feelings affect their daily lives.
- People with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) experience symptoms of anxiety that last for long periods of time.
- Repeated panic attacks are the main symptom of panic disorder.
- Social anxiety disorder is a common type of anxiety disorder. People with this disorder fear being in situations where they may be judged negatively by others.
- People with specific phobias experience intense anxiety about certain objects or situations.
- Some people experience anxiety when they are separated from their loved ones. They may be diagnosed with separation anxiety.



- Therapy such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which includes exposure therapy, is often used to treat anxiety disorders. Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy can also be used.
- Medication is one way to treat anxiety disorders. Antidepressants, benzodiazepines, and beta-blockers can help manage anxiety.
- Lifestyle changes, such as exercise and a healthy diet, can be helpful for people with anxiety disorders. These changes can boost the effects of medication or therapy.

# 1

## HOW DOES ANXIETY FEEL?

**A**nxiety has many symptoms. They include feeling tense, restless, and tired. Difficulty concentrating and changes in sleep are other symptoms. People with anxiety may feel easily frustrated. Anxiety can also have physical effects. People may have a headache or a stomachache.

People may experience some or all of these symptoms.

Anxiety affects daily life. It can cause changes in behavior. People may spend less time with family and friends. They may struggle at school or at work.

***People may experience a racing heartbeat when they feel anxious.***



## THE BODY'S RESPONSE TO DANGER

The amygdala is part of the human brain. It processes emotions, including fear. It alerts the body to danger. It starts the fight-or-flight response. This prepares the body to fight or run from threats.

High stress levels can start the fight-or-flight response. The body releases a **hormone** called adrenaline. It is released from the adrenal glands. These glands are located above the kidneys. Adrenaline causes the heart to beat faster. It increases blood flow to the muscles. This prepares them to respond quickly.

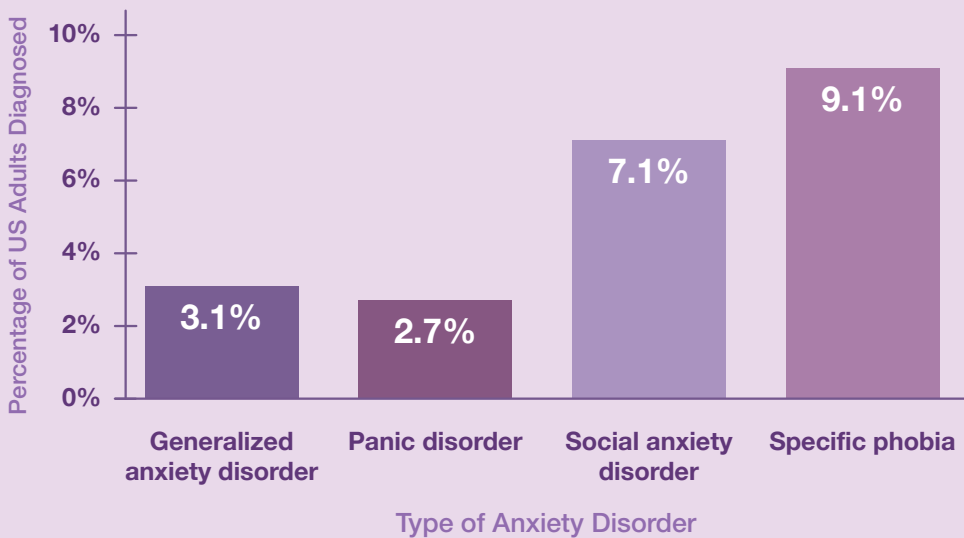


***The amygdala is about the size of an almond.  
There is one on each side of the brain.***

Sometimes this response remains active for a long time. People may experience anxiety. The amygdala may be overactive in people with an anxiety disorder. They may have high levels of adrenaline.



# HOW COMMON ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?



Source: "Anxiety Disorders Facts and Statistics," ADAA, October 28, 2022. <https://adaa.org>.

***This graph shows the approximate percentage of US adults who are diagnosed with anxiety disorders. People may be diagnosed with multiple disorders.***

They may feel anxious when eating in front of others. Social anxiety can make it difficult to go to school or work. Symptoms of this disorder include a rapid heartbeat

doctor because she does not want to get a shot.

Separation anxiety is another type of anxiety disorder. People fear being separated from their loved ones. They worry that something bad will happen to those they care about. This disorder is most

## AGORAPHOBIA

More than 1 percent of US adults experience agoraphobia. People with agoraphobia fear being in places where escape may be difficult. Crowds and public transport can cause anxiety. People may worry that they will not receive help if they have a panic attack. People with severe agoraphobia may be unable to leave home because of their anxiety. They may worry about having a panic attack in public.

# GLOSSARY

## **addictive**

having qualities that make it difficult to stop the use of a drug or a behavior

## **diagnosis**

an official identification of a disorder or disease made by a doctor

## **dose**

how much of a medication is taken and how often it is taken

## **hormone**

a chemical produced by the body that can affect mood or behavior

## **neurotransmitter**

a chemical substance that is produced in the brain and nerves

## **prescribe**

to officially recommend a medication or treatment

## **symptoms**

signs of a disease or disorder

## **withdrawal**

the symptoms and feelings caused by stopping the use of an addictive drug

# SOURCE NOTES

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# FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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