

Anxiety Disorders – An Overview

Anxiety disorders are common mental health conditions that affect how a person feels, thinks, and responds to stress. This leaflet provides general information about anxiety disorders and how they are understood in psychiatric care.

What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal human response to stress or perceived threat. It becomes a problem when anxiety is:

- Excessive or persistent
- Disproportionate to the situation
- Interfering with daily functioning

Anxiety disorders involve patterns of anxiety that continue beyond immediate stressors.

Common Features of Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders may involve a combination of:

- Excessive worry or fear
- Feeling tense, on edge, or overwhelmed
- Difficulty relaxing
- Physical symptoms such as:
 - Palpitations
 - Shortness of breath
 - Dizziness
 - Muscle tension
 - Gastrointestinal discomfort

Symptoms can fluctuate and may worsen during periods of stress.

How Anxiety Affects Daily Life

Anxiety can affect:

- Concentration and decision-making
- Sleep

- Work performance
- Social interactions
- Confidence and self-trust

Some people begin to avoid situations that trigger anxiety, which can further limit daily functioning.

Different Types of Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders may present in different forms, including:

- Generalised anxiety
- Panic attacks or panic disorder
- Social anxiety
- Specific fears or phobias
- Anxiety related to health, stress, or trauma

Symptoms often overlap, and presentations vary between individuals.

Causes and Contributing Factors

Anxiety disorders usually develop due to a combination of factors, such as:

- Biological vulnerability
- Stressful or overwhelming life events
- Ongoing stress or uncertainty
- Personality and coping styles
- Physical health conditions

There is rarely a single cause.

Anxiety and the Body

Anxiety involves activation of the body's **stress response system**.

This can lead to physical symptoms even when no immediate danger is present.

These physical symptoms are real and do not mean something is “imagined” or “made up”.

Diagnosis and Assessment

Diagnosis is based on:

- Clinical assessment
- Symptom patterns
- Duration and impact on functioning

Diagnosis may:

- Take time
- Be reviewed as symptoms change

A diagnosis helps guide treatment but does not define a person.

Treatment Approaches

Treatment may include:

- Psychological therapies
- Medication
- Lifestyle and stress-management strategies

Not all treatments are required for every person.
Care is tailored to individual needs and circumstances.

Anxiety and Avoidance

Avoidance of anxiety-provoking situations can:

- Provide short-term relief
- Worsen anxiety over time

Treatment often focuses on reducing avoidance in a gradual and supported way.

Recovery and Outlook

Many people with anxiety disorders:

- Improve with appropriate treatment
- Learn skills to manage symptoms
- Experience periods of stability

Improvement is often **gradual**, with fluctuations along the way.

When to Seek Help

Professional support is recommended if:

- Anxiety is persistent
- Daily functioning is affected
- Physical symptoms cause significant distress
- Coping strategies are no longer sufficient

Early support can reduce long-term impact.

Summary

Anxiety disorders are common, understandable, and treatable.

With appropriate care, many people regain confidence, functioning, and quality of life.
