

# Social Anxiety Disorder

Social Anxiety Disorder is a mental health condition involving **persistent fear of social or performance situations** where a person feels they may be judged, criticised, or negatively evaluated. This leaflet provides general information about social anxiety and how it is understood in psychiatric care.

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## What Is Social Anxiety?

Social anxiety goes beyond normal shyness.

It involves:

- Intense fear of social situations
- Ongoing concern about being judged or embarrassed
- Avoidance of situations that trigger anxiety

The anxiety is often recognised as excessive but feels difficult to control.

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## Common Situations That Trigger Social Anxiety

Triggers may include:

- Speaking in groups
- Meeting new people
- Being observed while working or eating
- Social events
- Performance or presentations

Triggers vary between individuals.

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## Symptoms of Social Anxiety

Symptoms may include:

- Intense anxiety before or during social situations
- Physical symptoms such as:
  - Blushing
  - Sweating

- Trembling
  - Rapid heartbeat
  - Fear of saying or doing something wrong
  - Strong self-criticism after social interactions
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## How Social Anxiety Affects Daily Life

Social anxiety can affect:

- Work or study
- Career progression
- Relationships
- Confidence and self-esteem

Avoidance can reduce opportunities and reinforce anxiety over time.

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## Why Social Anxiety Persists

Social anxiety is often maintained by:

- Heightened self-focus
- Fear of negative evaluation
- Avoidance and safety behaviours

Avoidance may reduce anxiety temporarily but strengthens fear in the long term.

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## Diagnosis and Assessment

Diagnosis is based on:

- Clinical assessment
- Symptom patterns
- Impact on functioning

Social anxiety may occur alongside other conditions such as depression or general anxiety.

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## Treatment Approaches

Treatment may include:

- Psychological therapies focused on reducing fear and avoidance
- Gradual exposure to feared situations
- Medication where appropriate

Treatment is tailored to individual needs and pace.

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## Social Anxiety and Performance

Social anxiety is not a sign of weakness or lack of ability.

Many people with social anxiety:

- Perform well when anxiety is managed
- Have strengths that are not reflected during anxious moments

Treatment focuses on reducing interference, not changing personality.

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## Recovery and Outlook

Many people with social anxiety:

- Experience improvement with treatment
- Gain confidence in social situations
- Reduce avoidance and distress

Improvement is usually **gradual** and supported by practice.

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## When to Seek Help

Professional support is recommended if:

- Social anxiety limits daily activities
- Avoidance is increasing
- Distress remains high despite self-help strategies

Early support can improve long-term outcomes.

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## Summary

Social Anxiety Disorder is a common and treatable condition involving fear of social judgement.

With appropriate care, many people learn to engage more comfortably in social and performance situations.

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