

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Facts about Anxiety Disorders

What is Anxiety?

Most people feel nervous or uneasy when they start a new job, go to the dentist, or travel to a new place. Some of us worry about what might happen “if.” Our hands may sweat, our heart may beat faster, or we get breathless for a moment. These are common anxious feelings that go away as we become more familiar with a situation or we resolve a worry over something.

What are Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety Disorders are much stronger versions of common anxious feelings. They are frequently unpredictable, and interfere with our everyday life. Over-anxious feelings can keep people from doing normal activities. Anxiety Disorders are the most common mental illnesses in the U. S., with about 16 percent of adults affected by them each year.

What are some different types of anxiety disorders?

- **Panic Disorder** causes repeated and often unexpected attacks of *intense fear*. The attacks come suddenly and are usually full blown in 10 to 15 minutes. Symptoms include chest pain, dizziness, fast heartbeat, sweating, breathlessness and nausea. People may feel scared, confused and believe they are dying. Women are at higher the risk for panic disorders. Both our hereditary and our life experiences contribute to them.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (also called OCD)** results in repeated, upsetting thoughts (called obsessions), or ritual behaviors (called compulsions). The thoughts or behaviors cannot be easily controlled or even stopped. Some obsessive thoughts may be worry that someone will be hurt, or germs will contaminate the house or our bodies. We use compulsive behaviors to try to control the obsessive thoughts. These behaviors might include repeating ordinary things like locking doors or washing hands. It is equally common among men and women.
- **Phobias** are very overwhelming fears tied to a very specific situation or thing. When we have a Phobia we limit our activities, frequently missing important life experiences. There are three main kinds of Phobias:
 - **Agoraphobia** - an intense fear or panic attack due to a situation that is hard to get out of, such as crowded or enclosed places. Women are twice as likely as men to develop Agoraphobia.
 - **Simple Phobia** - fear of a particular thing, like an animal, heights or injections.
 - **Social Phobia** - fear of receiving criticism or being embarrassed in front of others, which leads to avoiding social events.

What kind of doctor can help diagnose Anxiety Disorders?

With health care reform, insurance plans will cover treatment for mental health conditions just like any other health condition. You can refer yourself, or have your doctor refer you to a psychiatrist or psychologist. Many people receive care through licensed mental health centers. It’s important to have a medical exam to rule out other possible causes of anxiety symptoms.

How can Anxiety Disorders be treated?

Treatment for Anxiety Disorders often combines medications and specific types of talking therapies. Behavioral Therapy focuses on changing specific actions and uses techniques to stop unwanted behaviors. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy teaches people to identify, understand and change the ways they think.

For more information, contact: The Office of Consumer Partnerships - dbhrconsumerpartnerships@dshs.wa.gov.

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