

Anxiety

Anxiety is an emotional state commonly caused by the perception of real or potential danger that threatens the security of the individual. Everyone experiences a certain amount of nervousness and apprehension when faced with a stressful situation. Usually, the response is reasonable and adaptive, and contains a built-in control mechanism to return to a normal physiologic state. For some people, however, anxiety is more than just a temporary discomfort. For these individuals anxiety can be debilitating. It is when anxiety states become excessive or prolonged, particularly if it produces such psychological and physical stress, that the person cannot perform the activities of daily living, that medical help should be sought.

In general, anxiety disorders are a group of illnesses that develop before age 30 and are more common in women and those with a family history of anxiety and depression. Anxiety disorders are among the most frequent mental disorders encountered in a clinical setting. Approximately 8% of the population will experience at least one anxiety disorder in their lifetime.⁽¹⁾ Unfortunately, the majority of people with anxiety disorders receive no professional treatment.⁽²⁾ This is unfortunate because there is a great deal of success in treating anxiety disorders and a life that has been paralyzed can be renewed with appropriate treatment.

The /Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders/, 4th edition (DSM-IV) classifies anxiety disorders into several categories. The characteristics of these illnesses are anxiety and avoidance behavior and include: generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder (with or without agoraphobia), agoraphobia without history of panic disorder, phobic disorders (social phobia or specific phobia), obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and acute stress disorder.⁽³⁾

Research studies have shown that there is a difference between normal anxiety and pathologic anxiety states. This difference involves multiple brain structures and neurotransmitter systems. Current drug therapy centers around the use of drugs which alter activity of one or more neurotransmitters, or act at the neurochemical receptor site.

About the Author

Footnotes Back to Top ^{^1} Surgeon General's Report on Anxiety Disorders and Mental Health. Washington DC; Dec1999. ^{^2} Kessler RC, McGonagle KA, Zhao S, et al. Lifetime and 12-month prevalence of DSM-III-R psychiatric disorders in the United States. Results from the National Comorbidity Survey. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 1994;51:8-19. View Abstract view-abs.asp?fnid=104051&absid=102030 ^{^3} American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and statistical manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed. DSM-IV, Washington DC: American Psychiatric Press; 1994:393-444. Powered by NHIOndemand Copyright © 2000-2008 NHIOndemand All rights reserved. www.nhiondemand.com This information is educational in context and is not to be used to diagnose, treat or cure any disease. Please consult your licensed health care practitioner before using this or any medical information.

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