



Anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is something that we can all experience when we are faced with difficult situations. Sometimes those situations are real, like a sports match or an exam. Sometimes we create those situations in our mind, like worrying about things that 'could' happen in future.

Anxiety is our body's way of preparing us to manage difficult situations. It can actually help us perform better by helping us feel alert and motivated. But sometimes anxiety can get so intense that it gets in the way of daily life – this is when anxiety becomes a problem.



What are the symptoms of anxiety?



Physical symptoms can include:

- a racing heart
- faster breathing
- feeling tense
- sweating
- shaking
- feeling sick in the stomach.

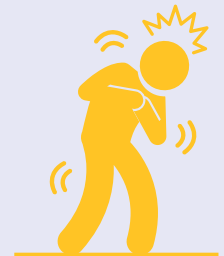
Other signs include:

- worrying a lot of the time
- being unable to relax
- avoiding places or people
- having trouble concentrating
- feeling annoyed or restless
- difficulty sleeping.

What are panic attacks?

Panic attacks can occur as part of an anxiety disorder but not everyone with anxiety problems will experience them.

During a panic attack, a person may suddenly overcome by strong fear and physical symptoms of anxiety, like a pounding heart, sweating, difficulty breathing, shaking, feeling dizzy or feeling sick. Panic attacks are usually short (about 10 minutes) and often feel overwhelming. Someone experiencing a panic attack might feel like they're having a heart attack or an asthma attack; they might feel like they're losing control.



Anxiety



Types of anxiety disorder

Anxiety symptoms can come and go – but for some people, they last a long time and have a big impact on their daily life. These are signs of an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental health problems experienced by young people. Some common types are:

- **Generalised anxiety:** Excessive worry about a variety of things, like work or school. Someone experiencing generalised anxiety disorder may feel that their worries are out of control or feel tense and nervous most of the time.
- **Social anxiety:** Intense anxiety in social situations due to fear of embarrassment or judgment by others. This often leads a person to avoid social situations.
- **Panic disorder:** This is when a person has lots of panic attacks and experiences ongoing fears about having another panic attack.
- **Specific phobias:** Intense fear of a particular situation or object (like small spaces or spiders) that leads a person to avoid the situation or object.

When should I get help?

If the anxiety has been going on for some time without improvement it's really important to help get the support of a professional – like your local doctor or a mental health professional. There are mental health professionals at headspace centres and eheadspace (online and phone support) who can help.

An important part of professional support is often talking (psychological) therapy. This might involve helping you to understand your experiences of anxiety and to learn anxiety management skills. Some medications can also help with anxiety disorders.

The good news is that most young people experiencing anxiety respond well to treatment. While your anxiety might still come and go, with support you can get back to enjoying life again.

Related problems



Many young people experiencing an anxiety disorder may also experience symptoms of depression. Some young people may also drink alcohol or use drugs to help them feel better. But relying on alcohol or drugs can make things much worse in the long run.

What can I do to overcome anxiety?

While some amount of anxiety is a natural part of life, there are lots of things you can do to manage your anxiety.

- Take care of yourself. Eat well, exercise and find ways to relax (like listening to music, meditating or doing activities you enjoy).
- Talk to someone that you trust about how you are feeling, like a family member or friend, a teacher or coach, or your mob or Elders. They can help you to work out what is going on and what support you might need.
- It's normal to want to avoid situations that make you feel anxious, but over time it can make the anxiety worse, because you don't get the opportunity to learn that the thing you fear may not happen or be as bad as you think. Learn some skills to cope with anxiety (like positive self-talk), then gradually face the things you fear and put your skills into action! As you realise you can manage anxious situations, you'll become more confident and motivated to keep it up.
- Try to avoid, or at least limit, your use of alcohol and other drugs.



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au