

What is anxiety?

Anxiety can affect everyone from time to time and it is a natural reaction to a stressful situation. However, anxiety is different to stress where the feelings dissipate once the stressful situation has passed. With anxiety the feelings remain.

The exact causes of anxiety are unclear, but it is likely to be a combination of biological and environmental influences that contribute to its development. Approximately one in four people will experience an anxiety disorder at some time in their life.

Some of the common symptoms of anxiety include:

- Repeated anxious thoughts
- Feeling Restless
- Irritability
- Trembling
- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Sweating
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Rapid heartbeat
- Feeling lightheaded
- Upset stomach

When anxious thoughts, feelings, or physical symptoms persist over a prolonged period of time and they have a negative impact on a person's every-day life, a GP might diagnose anxiety.

The six most common anxiety disorders are:

Generalised Anxiety Disorder

People with GAD might find it difficult to continue with their day-to-day activities due to excess worrying. The difference between "normal" worrying and generalized anxiety disorder is that the worrying involved in GAD is excessive, intrusive, persistent and debilitating.

Social Anxiety Disorder

Social Anxiety Disorder is a persistent fear of social situations. It usually begins in childhood or adolescence and can interfere with daily routines, social, school and work life. It can manifest as an intense fear of undertaking everyday tasks such as shopping, walking the dog and answering the telephone. It can have an extremely negative impact on a person's confidence and their emotional and social wellbeing.

Specific Phobia

A phobia is a persistent, excessive and unreasonable fear which is caused by a specific object or situation. People who have a phobia tend to avoid whatever is causing their fear and this can affect their daily life. Phobias can be specific (e.g. the dark, snakes, dentists, flying and injections), or complex (social phobia, agoraphobia).

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

OCD manifests as persistent and intrusive thoughts, images, worries or impulses which significantly interfere with day-to-day living. Obsessional thoughts are followed by repetitive compulsive behaviours, actions or thought rituals which are undertaken in an attempt to relieve the anxiety caused by the obsessional thoughts. Relief gained through this behaviour is short lived and the compulsive behaviour reinforces the obsession.

Darwin (Head Office)

P. (08) 8941 1752

F. (08) 8941 0746

asadarwin@easa.org.au

Alice Springs

(08) 8953 4225

esaalicesprings@easa.org.au

Katherine

P. (08) 8941 1752

F. (08) 8941 0746

Toll Free (NT only)

1800 193 123

www.easa.org.au

Anxiety

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Nearly everyone will have stress related symptoms for the first month or so after a traumatic event. This is a normal reaction to acute stress and most people will slowly come to terms with what has happened, and their stress symptoms will lessen and eventually disappear. Some people will find that their symptoms continue and a diagnosis of PTSD might then be made. Some symptoms of PTSD are: flashbacks to the event; recurring nightmares; avoiding places and/or people that trigger memories of the event and having difficulty sleeping and/or relaxing.

Panic Disorder

Panic attacks are relatively common and an attack may have several physiological symptoms which include: heart racing, nausea, shaking, sweating, dizziness, feeling faint and/or tightness of the chest. Panic disorder is less common and is diagnosed when: the attacks are recurring, there is excessive and ongoing worry that another attack may happen, there is consistent anxiety around the cause of the attacks and behaviour is affected by fear of having a panic attack (i.e. avoiding certain places).

How to Cope

Some simple lifestyle changes can assist in helping to reduce anxiety. These include:

- Schedule daily brief mindful exercises – www.mindfulnessmuse.com and www.pocketmindfulness.com have some helpful exercises.
- Visit www.ecouch.anu.edu.au where you can access information on helpful exercises and toolkits.
- Visit www.cci.health.wa.gov.au where you can access self-help workbooks such as “What? Me Worry!?!”
- Engage in some regular exercise.
- Reduce your intake of drugs and other stimulants (caffeine, alcohol).
- Plan a pleasant, enjoyable activity for yourself each day.
- Establish good sleeping patterns.
- Eat a nutritious diet
- Investigate supplements that may be helpful (e.g. Omega 3 has been shown to reduce anxiety).
- Accept it! Many people are fearful of anxiety and the fear can make anxiety worse. Accepting your anxiety and talking about it is likely to make your anxiety less intimidating and likely to lessen the difficulty living with it.

Psychological and medical treatment is available for people suffering from anxiety. Psychological treatment usually includes psycho-education around what is happening and why, as well as teaching you skills to help manage the anxiety. EASA have psychologists and counsellors who work with Mindfulness, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – all of which have been shown to be helpful in managing anxiety. A general practitioner may prescribe medication if they feel it will be beneficial and suitable.