

DID YOU KNOW?

Technophobia is fear of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technology. This relatively recent fear stems from the unknown future people will share with the introduction of AI. For most people, technophobia isn't an anxiety disorder because it doesn't consume their thoughts, but that may change in the future.

Chapter **1** Introducing Anxiety

There's plenty to worry about — wars, poverty, natural disasters, bird flu, civil unrest, violence, crime, and terrorism threaten the safety and security of people around the world. But most people find that these huge existential threats aren't what keeps them up at night. Instead, it's whether they paid the electric bill, who's going to pick up the kids, or figuring out how to get day-to-day things accomplished. This chapter looks at anxiety — what it is and what it isn't. It describes the types of anxiety disorders and the prevalence of anxiety.

What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling in your body that signals fear and distress. You respond to a physical feeling — maybe an increased heart rate, a sinking feeling in your gut, a tightening in your throat, increased sweating, tightness in your chest, or dizziness.

People experience anxiety differently, but the signal those feelings induce are worry, fear, apprehension, or uneasiness. The primary reaction to anxiety is to avoid what you fear. Anxiety is a perfectly normal reaction, until it becomes excessive.

How Is Anxiety Different from Everyday Worry?

In many ways, anxiety and everyday worry are the same. Worry involves physical, behavioral, and emotional responses to something feared — and so does anxiety. People worry about real, probable, possibilities.

When worry becomes severe or persistent, or when it interferes with daily life, it is considered an anxiety disorder.

What Is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is like the common cold of mental health issues. Life causes everyone to worry. But people with GAD worry almost constantly. They worry about their family, even when the worry is unjustified. They worry about money, even when they have enough money in their bank accounts. They worry about the weather, even when it's sunny.

In other words, people with GAD worry about everything, including worry. Why do they worry so much? Because they want to control their environment, their health, and other people's problems, and they want to find solutions. They can't stand the uncertainties of life.

Everyone worries, sometimes too much. But those with GAD can't stop worrying. That worry interferes with their lives and health.

Are There Different Types of Anxiety Disorders?

There are different categories of anxiety. Here are the most common:

- » **GAD:** Worry about almost everything all the time.

- » **Specific phobia:** A *phobia* (intense fear) of one or more things or situations, such as animals, flying, elevators, heights, vomiting, blood, or just about anything. Avoidance is very strong. Some people have multiple phobias.
- » **Social anxiety disorder (also known as social phobia):** Fear of one or more social situations, such as public speaking, interacting with others at a party, meeting new people, or eating and drinking around others. The fear usually relates to worries about being judged by others and is persistent. It also causes avoidance of social situations.
- » **Panic disorder:** A quick surge of physical feelings of panic, including shortness of breath, rapid pulse, chest tightness or pain, tremors, nausea, fear of losing control, chills, or feeling feverish. These unexpected attacks start a cycle of worry and attempts to avoid future attacks.
- » **Agoraphobia:** Extreme worry about two of the following situations: being outside of the home, standing in a crowded place, being in enclosed spaces (like a theater or shop), being in open spaces (such as a parking lot or mall), or using public transportation.

How Common Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the most common of all mental disorders. It affects people all over the world. About one in four people have anxiety and about half will suffer from anxiety sometime during their lifetimes. Anxiety is perfectly normal when it's a response to something dangerous or difficult. If you can't pay your bills, you worry. If your teen is out late at night, you become anxious. When a snake is rattling its tail at you, you get scared. Anxiety only becomes a disorder when it is excessive and disrupts everyday life.

