

## How Are Anxiety Disorders Treated?

Anxiety disorder can be treated with therapy, medication or both. Two forms of effective therapy are behavior therapy, which focuses on changing behavior; and cognitive therapy, that teaches individuals to understand and change their thinking patterns so they can react differently to the situations that cause them anxiety. Medication can help to reduce the anxiety symptoms as well.

## How Can I Get Help?

If you or your family member exhibits some of the above symptoms of anxiety disorders, consult your family doctor and ask for an appropriate mental health evaluation and treatment.

You and your family member may be eligible to receive mental health services from the County Mental Health Plan. The County has a toll free number available 24 hours a day, which is staffed with mental health specialists who can assess your needs and make appropriate referrals. They will be able to talk with you in your preferred language. Their services and phone numbers are listed in the county government pages of your local phone book.



## Where Can I Get More Information?

National Institute of Mental Health  
(888) 826-9438  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Mental Health Association  
(800) 969-6642  
<http://www.nmha.org>

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
Children and Adolescents Network  
(800) 950-6264  
<http://www.nami.org>

Anxiety Disorders Assoc. of America  
(240) 485-1001  
<http://www.adaa.org>



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF  
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**ANXIETY DISORDERS  
IN ADULTS**





## What are Anxiety Disorders?

Most people feel anxiety sometimes and anxious feelings are a normal part of life. However, an individual who feels anxious too often, too much, or for too long, may have an emotional disorder called an Anxiety Disorder. Anxiety disorders are mental illnesses that can fill people's lives with overwhelming worry, apprehension, or tension, and fear that is chronic, constant, and can grow progressively worse if not treated.

For some people, anxiety disorders may become so overwhelming that they start having trouble functioning at home, work or school. Anxiety disorders are the most common form of mental illness--about 19 million American adults suffer from these disorders.

Anxiety disorders are treatable! Effective treatment starts with getting the appropriate diagnosis of the anxiety disorder. In addition to an evaluation by mental health professionals, most of the time a medical evaluation by a physician is necessary to rule out potential physical health causes of the symptoms.

## What Are Common Types of Anxiety Disorders?

### 1. Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Persons with this disorder worry excessively about family, health, work or other things even when there is little cause. They may have:

- Difficulty controlling their worries
- Feelings of anxiety and irritability
- Physical complaints, including headaches or other body aches without obvious reasons



- Sleep disturbance and become easily fatigued

### 2. Panic Disorder

This disorder is characterized by anxiety attacks, which typically last just a few minutes. Onset is sudden with intense, overwhelming terror for no apparent reason, accompanied by some of the following:

- Sweating, rapid heart beat, trembling
- Shortness of breath, chest discomfort, faintness
- Fear of dying, going crazy, or losing control
- Avoidance of any place or situation associated with the attacks
- Agoraphobia--an intense fear of being in a public place

### 3. Phobias

People who suffer from this disorder feel terror, panic, and avoidance when faced with a feared object or situation. They will often avoid the trigger of their fears, which may interfere with work, family and social situations. Common types of phobias are:

- Social Phobia--an intense fear of being humiliated in front of others
- Specific Phobia--an intense fear of specific objects or situations such as elevators or crossing bridges

### 4. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

People with OCD suffer from repeated obsessions (e.g. intrusive thoughts) that cause distress and extreme anxiety. In attempting to reduce this anxiety, they often perform repetitive behaviors (compulsions) such as excessive handwashing or checking on specific objects. OCD sufferers usually recognize that their obsessions are unwarranted, but feel powerless to stop them.

### 5. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

This disorder occurs in persons who have survived a severe trauma such as natural disasters, war, torture, physical attack or rape. They keep re-experiencing the trauma through recurrent nightmares or memories of the event, flashbacks, and extreme emotional, mental and physical distress when exposed to situations that remind them of the trauma. They may feel numb, detached, nervous and overly guarded. They often have trouble sleeping.

## What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

The precise cause of most mental disorders is not fully understood.

In general, mental disorders result from a combination of genetic factors, other biological factors, and environmental factors. It is not uncommon for there to be a family history of anxiety disorders, particularly in the case of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

