



ANXIETY DISORDERS

What it is:

Anxiety disorders are a group of disorders that all share emotions of excessive fear and anxiety and behavioural disturbances resulting from this. Fear is defined as an emotional response to real or perceived danger, and can often result in a flight or fight reaction. Anxiety is related more to perceived future dangers and may result in muscle tension and super vigilance in preparation for what is expected to come. Panic attacks are a common feature in anxiety disorders, as a particular fear response. Panic attacks can be seen in other mental disorders other than panic disorders as well. Anxiety disorders differ from normal fears and concerns in that the fear is often inappropriate to the real threat involved. In many of the disorders the symptoms may be similar, but the events or circumstances that trigger the fear or anxiety are different. Many anxiety disorders develop in childhood and tend to persist if not treated properly.

Common symptoms:

1. Feelings of apprehension or dread
2. Trouble concentrating
3. Feeling tense and jumpy
4. Anticipating the worst
5. Irritability
6. Restlessness
7. Watching for signs of danger
8. Pounding heart
9. Sweating
10. Stomach upset or dizziness
11. Frequent urination or diarrhoea
12. Shortness of breath
13. Tremors and twitches
14. Muscle tension
15. Headaches
16. Fatigue
17. Insomnia



**SA Federation for
Mental Health**

Causes:

There are a number of factors are believed to contribute to the development of anxiety disorders. Anxiety disorders may be caused by problems in the functioning of brain circuits that regulate fear and other emotions. Studies have shown that severe or long-lasting stress can change the way nerve cells within these circuits transmit information from one region of the brain to another. There may also be a genetic component as studies have shown that anxiety disorders run in families. Certain environmental factors, such as trauma or a significant life event, may also trigger an anxiety disorder.

Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*