



Anxiety Disorders

Everyone knows what it's like to feel anxious – the butterflies in your stomach before a first date, the tension you feel when the boss is angry, and the way your heart pounds when you're in danger.

Anxiety rouses you to action. It gears you up to face a threatening situation. It makes you study harder for that exam, and keeps you on your toes when you're making a speech. In general it helps you cope.

But if you have an anxiety disorder, this normally helpful emotion can do just the opposite – it can keep you from coping and can disrupt your daily life. Anxiety disorders are not just a case of 'nerves'. They are disabilities, often related to the biological make-up and life experiences of the individual. We now find they run in families, just like diabetes, asthma and other illnesses.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, each with its own distinct features. Those who suffer from anxiety disorders may feel anxious most of the time, without any apparent reason. The anxious feelings may be so uncomfortable that, to avoid them, they may stop some everyday activities. Others may have occasional bouts of anxiety so intense they become terrified and immobilised.

Anxiety disorders are the most common of all mental health difficulties. Many people misunderstand these disorders and think individuals should be able to overcome the symptoms by sheer willpower. Wishing the symptoms away does not work – but there are treatments that can help.

Phobias

Phobias belong to the family of anxiety disorders.

Phobias occur in several forms. A specific phobia is a fear of a particular object or situation. Social phobia* is a fear of being painfully embarrassed in a social setting. Agoraphobia, * which often accompanies panic disorder, is a fear of being in any situation that might provoke a panic attack, or from which escape might be difficult if one occurred.

Specific Phobias*

Many people experience specific phobias. Intense, irrational fears of certain things or situations – dogs, closed-in-places, heights, escalators, tunnels, motorway driving, water, flying, and injuries involving blood - are a few of the more common ones.

- *1) Social Phobia – see separate information sheet
- *2) Agoraphobia – see separate information sheet
- *3) Specific Phobias – see separate information sheet

Phobias aren't just extreme fear, they are irrational fear. You may be able to ski the world's tallest mountains with ease but panic going above the 10th floor of an office building.

People with phobias realise their fears are irrational, but often facing, or even thinking of facing, the feared object or situation brings on severe anxiety or a panic attack.

