

Anxiety Fact Sheet

Anxiety is a natural response to stress and can be felt in different situations, such as before an important exam or when facing a difficult decision. It is a feeling of unease, worry, or fear that can range from mild to severe and can include physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, shaking, muscle tension, and sweating.

While a certain level of anxiety is normal and can even be beneficial, excessive or persistent anxiety can interfere with daily life and mental well-being.

Key facts

- Anxiety is a common mental health disorder that affects more than 275 million people worldwide.
- Women are twice as likely to experience anxiety compared to men.
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is the most common type of anxiety disorder, affecting about 6.8 million adults in the United States alone.
- Untreated anxiety can lead to other mental health issues and physical health problems.
- Anxiety is treatable with therapy, medication, or a combination of both.

Epidemiology

Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent mental health disorder globally, affecting people of all ages and backgrounds. In 2017, an estimated 3.8% of the global population had anxiety disorders, making it one of the leading causes of disability worldwide. Women are more likely to experience anxiety, with a 1.5-2 times higher prevalence compared to men (McLean et al., 2011).

Causes

A variety of factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality traits, life events, and environmental stressors, can cause anxiety. People who have a family history of anxiety are more likely to develop the disorder themselves. Neurotransmitters in the brain, such as serotonin and dopamine, also play a role in anxiety.

Certain personality traits, such as perfectionism or low self-esteem, can make individuals more prone to experiencing anxiety. Traumatic or stressful life events, such as the loss of a loved one or job, can trigger anxiety.

Moreover, environmental stressors like living in poverty or being exposed to violence can also contribute to the development of anxiety.

Symptoms

The symptoms of anxiety can vary from person to person, but the most common ones include:

- Excessive worrying and fear about everyday situations
- Restlessness and difficulty concentrating
- Muscle tension and aches
- Fatigue and trouble sleeping
- Irritability and agitation
- Panic attacks (sudden feelings of intense fear or dread)
- Avoiding situations that trigger anxiety
- Physical symptoms such as racing heart, sweating, and shortness of breath

Types

There are several types of anxiety disorders, including:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD):** Involves excessive and uncontrollable worry about everyday situations. This type of anxiety can interfere with daily activities and can be difficult to control.
- **Panic disorder:** Characterized by recurring panic attacks that cause intense fear or discomfort. These attacks can come on suddenly and without warning.
- **Social anxiety disorder:** Social anxiety involves a fear of judgment or embarrassment in social situations, making it difficult to engage with others and often resulting in avoidance of social activities.
- **Specific phobias:** This entails an intense dread of a particular object or situation, like heights, snakes, or flying. While these fears may be irrational, they can lead to notable distress and avoidance behaviors.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD):** It involves recurring thoughts (obsessions) and behaviors (compulsions) that are difficult to control, causing significant distress and interfering with daily life.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** PTSD can develop after a traumatic event and is characterized by flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety related to the event.

Treatment

It is important to seek treatment for anxiety as it can greatly impact one's daily life and overall well-being. The most common forms of treatment for anxiety include therapy, medication, or a combination of both (Bandelow, et. al., 2017).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a type of therapy that focuses on identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors that contribute to anxiety. This can help individuals learn coping mechanisms for managing their symptoms.

Medications, such as antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications, can also be prescribed by a doctor to help manage anxiety symptoms. It is important to work closely with a healthcare professional when taking medication for anxiety, as they can monitor any potential side effects and adjust the dosage accordingly.

Coping strategies

In addition to seeking professional treatment, there are also coping strategies that can help manage anxiety on a daily basis. These include:

- Deep breathing exercises or meditation
- Regular exercise and physical activity
- Practicing relaxation techniques such as yoga or progressive muscle relaxation
- Engaging in hobbies or activities that bring joy and relaxation
- Avoiding alcohol and drug use, which can exacerbate anxiety symptoms
- Making lifestyle changes, such as getting enough sleep and maintaining a healthy diet
- Joining a support group for individuals with anxiety to connect with others who understand their experiences

Resources

To learn more about anxiety and find support, there are many resources available such as:

- [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) (ADAA): a non-profit organization that provides information and resources on anxiety disorders
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI): an organization with resources, support groups, and education for individuals and families affected by mental illness
- [Mental Health America](#) (MHA): a community-based non-profit organization that offers mental health education and support
- Local mental health centers or clinics may also offer services and resources for managing anxiety.

References

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