Anxiety

What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the feeling of worry, nervousness, or fear. Everyone feels anxious sometimes, such as before exams, job interviews, or big life events. It is a reaction that helps us stay alert and focused. But when anxiety is too strong, lasts a long time, or stops someone from doing daily activities, it may develop to an anxiety disorder

Causes of Anxiety

Anxiety can be caused by a mix of factors:

Genetics: People with family members who have anxiety or depression are more likely to develop anxiety.

Brain Chemistry: Chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters control mood. Imbalances in these chemicals can trigger anxiety.

Life Experiences: Stressful events like accidents, trauma, abuse, or losing someone important can lead to anxiety.

Health Conditions: Chronic illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, and alcohol or drug misuse can increase anxiety.

Personality: People who are very sensitive, perfectionist, or worry more may be at risk.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

- Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD): Persistent and excessive worry about everyday things like work, health, or family.
- Panic Disorder: Sudden episodes of intense fear called panic attacks. These can include chest pain, fast heartbeat, shortness of breath, and dizziness.
- Social Anxiety Disorder: Strong fear of social situations, meeting people, or being judged.
- Phobias: Extreme fear of particular things or situations like heights, flying, spiders, or injections.
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD): Repeated thoughts (obsessions) or behaviours (compulsions) to relieve anxiety.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Anxiety after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, causing flashbacks, nightmares, or severe distress.

Who Can Get Anxiety?

Anxiety can affect anyone at any age, gender, or background. In Australia, about 1 in 4 people will experience an anxiety disorder during their life. This includes adults, teenagers, and sometimes children. Anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia.

Children & Teenagers

- Anxiety often begins in the school years.
- Kids may worry too much about schoolwork, friends, or everyday situations.
- It can show through stomach aches, headaches, trouble sleeping, or avoiding activities.

- Other Therapies: Counselling, mindfulness therapy, or relaxation techniques may be used alongside.

Medications

- Antidepressants (SSRIs): Help regulate brain chemicals and reduce anxiety symptoms.
- Benzodiazepines: Fast-acting medications for short-term relief but not recommended for long-term use due to addiction risk.
- Other Medications: Sometimes other drugs are prescribed based on individual needs.

Lifestyle and Self-Care

- Exercise: Regular physical activity reduces stress and improves mood.
- Healthy Diet: Balanced nutrition supports mental health.
- Sleep: Adequate rest improves coping and focus.
- Relaxation Techniques: Deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or mindfulness can calm the mind.
- Goal Setting: Break tasks into small steps to reduce stress.
- Social Support: Talk to trusted friends or family. Join support groups.
- Limit Stimulants: Reduce caffeine, sugar, and alcohol

How Anxiety Affects Daily Life

Untreated anxiety can cause: -

- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Poor performance at work or school
- Problems with relationships
- Physical health issues like heart problems, digestive issues, or chronic pain
- Risk of substance misuse, including alcohol or drugs
- Early help can prevent long-term problems.

Support and Services in Australia

These services can help:

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 – Offers support, advice, and online resources. https://www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline: 13 11 14 – 24/7 crisis support. https://www.lifeline.org.au

Headspace: 1800 650 890 – Support for young people. https://www.headspace.org.au –

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 – Counselling for those at risk or supporting someone. https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Young Adults (16–24)

- It often happens due to life changing event such as finishing school, starting work or study, moving out, or forming new relationships.
- Money stress and worries about the future.

Women

- Work stress, family demands, health concerns, and money worries are regular triggers.
- Hormonal changes such as puberty, pregnancy, after giving birth, and menopause can raise the risk.
- Anxiety tends to cause more day-to-day problems for women compared to men.

Men

- Common causes include job pressure, financial strain, relationship stress, or health worries.
- Men may hold back from talking about how they feel or reaching out for help.
- It may show as irritability, anger, sleep problems, or physical symptoms like chest pain or headaches.

Older Adults

- Anxiety can increase later in life, especially with retirement or health changes.
- Triggers include chronic illness, pain, losing independence, grief, or loneliness.
- Symptoms are sometimes missed because they can look like other health issues.
- If left untreated, anxiety can make physical health worse and lower quality of life.

Signs and Symptoms

Physical Symptoms:

- Fast heartbeat or palpitations
- Sweating, trembling, or shaking
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Muscle tension and aches

- Feeling very tired
- Shortness of breath or chest tightness

Emotional Symptoms:

- Constant worry, fear, or dread
- Feeling irritable or on edge
- Feeling restless or unable to relax
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling overwhelmed or out of control

Behavioural Symptoms:

- Avoiding people, places, or activities
- Trouble completing tasks at work or school
- Procrastination or withdrawal from social activities

Diagnosis

Anxiety is diagnosed by professionals such as general practitioners (GPs), psychologists, or psychiatrists. Diagnosis includes:

Clinical Interviews: Discussion about your feelings, thoughts, daily life, and health history.

Questionnaires: Questionnaires to measure anxiety severity and impact.

Physical Examinations: Checking for other medical problems that may cause anxiety symptoms.

Treatment Options

Psychological Therapies

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Learn to identify negative thoughts and replace them with positive, realistic ones. Helps change behaviours that increase anxiety.
- Exposure Therapy: facing feared situations to reduce fear over time.
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): Accepting thoughts and feelings while taking steps to live according to personal values.