

ANXIETY

15 Frequently Asked Questions



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Why do some people feel anxiety so strongly? Doesn't everyone experience anxiety in their lives from time to time?

In short, all people are unique. Everyone goes through their own lives with a series of unique experiences, cultural influences, thoughts, opinions, and relationships. All of these factors (and more!) combine to build a full picture of a single person's unique life experience. Because there are so many factors that play into a person's life experience, the reason why someone may feel more anxious than another person is also highly unique.

Anxiety and its causes can be extremely nuanced. For example, someone may experience strong anxiety issues because of a traumatic experience they had in childhood, while someone else may experience the same intensity of anxiety because of their current workplace situation.

The reasons for developing anxiety are truly limitless, and all of those reasons also play against a person's unique sense of self and personality.

Everyone is going to experience anxiety from time to time. Anxiety is actually a useful tool—feeling anxious can spur a person into “fight, flight, or freeze” mode, which can create a sense of urgency needed to respond to a problem. However, because there are many circumstances in life that can cause a person to end up in a constant sense of urgency, it causes their anxiety experiences to elevate into a problem.

What are some stigmas surrounding anxiety?

Though anxiety problems are common, there are some stigmas surrounding having them. For example, some common stigmas surrounding anxiety include...

- A lack of seriousness: Some people don't think anxiety is a “real” problem because it doesn't involve anything that can be seen, such as a physical issue.
- The notion that an anxiety sufferer just needs to “calm down”: If someone struggling with anxiety could simply calm down and forget about it, they would! Unfortunately, anxiety can often be difficult to quell. Sometimes, people assume that an anxious person just needs to calm themselves, but doing so isn't always so simple.

- The idea that someone with anxiety is just being over-dramatic: Anxiety can lead to some extreme behaviors, especially if the anxious person is in a panicked state. This can cause others to believe that they're acting that way for extra attention or that they're being over-dramatic.
- That anxiety is just normal stress: Experiencing a state of anxiety elevates far beyond normal day-to-day stress. At this point, anxiety is overwhelming and creates problems that make living a regular, routine life difficult.

What are some common symptoms of anxiety?

There are many different symptoms associated with anxiety. Consider these common ones:

- Excessive worrying: Persistent and uncontrollable worry about various aspects of life, such as work, health, family, or everyday situations. Sometimes, the person may worry about something very unlikely or even ludicrous.
- Feeling restless and unable to relax: Feeling on edge, restless, or having a constant need to move. Individuals with anxiety may find it challenging to be still and really relax.
- Fatigue: Feeling constantly tired or having low energy, even after a full night's sleep. Anxiety requires a lot of energy from a person and can even negatively impact their sleep routines.
- Irritability: Becoming easily irritable or agitated. Small stressors may provoke strong emotional reactions that seem over-the-top or excessive for the situation at hand.
- Issues with muscle tension: Physical symptoms such as muscle tension, tightness, or aches, especially in the neck, shoulders, or jaw. It isn't unusual for an anxious person to complain of physical aches and pains from all the clenching and tension.
- Sleep disturbances: Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restless and disturbed sleep patterns. Anxious thoughts can cause a person to lose lots of much-needed sleep.

- **Difficulty concentrating:** Finding it challenging to focus or concentrate on tasks due to racing thoughts or mental distractions. When you're overly anxious, it can feel impossible to focus on anything that isn't related to what is making you feel anxious.
- **Physical symptoms:** Experiencing physical symptoms like trembling, sweating, nausea, dizziness, or a racing heart. Though anxiety is a mental health issue, the strains it can place on a person's physical body are very real.
- **Engaging in avoidance behavior:** Avoiding certain situations or activities that trigger anxiety, leading to social isolation or disruption of daily life. Instead of living life normally, an anxious person might purposefully avoid certain situations they know bring them more anxiety.
- **Excessive self-consciousness:** Fear of judgment or embarrassment in social situations, leading to self-consciousness and avoidance of social interactions. Some anxious people feel the way they do because they fear judgment from others, so they engage in lots of self-conscious behaviors.
- **Panic attacks:** Intense episodes of fear or discomfort accompanied by physical symptoms such as a pounding heart, shortness of breath, chest pain, and a feeling of losing control. Anxious people are prone to panic attacks, especially when their anxiety reaches a peak.
- **A desire for perfectionism:** A strong desire to achieve perfection in tasks, accompanied by a fear of making mistakes or being criticized. Anxious people tend to believe that a perfect life will eliminate any issues, so they may strive to make everything perfect.
- **Catastrophic Thinking:** A tendency to anticipate the worst possible outcomes in situations, even when there is no clear evidence to support such fears. It is easy for overly anxious people to allow their thoughts to slip to catastrophic heights.

What are some common interventions used to assist someone with an anxiety problem or disorder?

Fortunately, there are a variety of interventions that can be used to assist a person struggling with anxiety.

- Lifestyle changes: Sometimes, easing anxiety can hinge on making some crucial lifestyle changes. For example, someone who uses alcohol can back away from drinking—doing so can ease anxiety.
- Therapy: Talking to a therapist is one of the best ways to learn effective coping strategies for anxiety. A trained mental health professional will help an anxious person get to the roots of their problems and help them find workable solutions that can make a serious difference.
- Meditation and deep breathing exercises: Learning how to regain control of the body is an excellent way to quell anxiety. When anxiety heightens, other physical symptoms tend to manifest—for example, a person may experience difficulty breathing or a quickened pulse. Learning how to meditate and use deep breathing exercises to regain control of the body and ease anxiety.
- Reach out to a support system: Anxiety doesn't need to happen alone. People with anxiety can identify who is in their support system and reach out to them when they need help and feel most anxious. A good support system filled with people can be a huge asset when someone is working on quelling anxiety.

What causes someone to form an issue with anxiety, such as Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)?

The reasons why someone forms an issue with anxiety are unique to them. There are many reasons why a person may develop an anxiety issue at any age.

- Some people are naturally more anxious. They are born with a predilection to feel more anxious in many situations compared to the average person.
- Traumatic experiences can cause anxiety issues to form. After going through a particularly traumatic experience (at any age), a person can develop a heightened sense of anxiety, as if they fear the same trauma to recur.
- Brain chemistry can play a huge role in the development of an anxiety disorder. Some people naturally have imbalances of various neurotransmitters, which can contribute to anxiety.
- Certain environmental factors can cause anxiety to form. For example, a person living in an abusive, chaotic, or unpredictable home situation may develop an anxiety disorder because of it.

What are some key identifying symptoms of an anxiety disorder?

Anxiety disorders can be difficult to identify because the symptoms can vary widely from person to person. However, there are some key symptoms that can make identifying them a little easier, such as...

- **Excessive Worry:** An anxious person likely experiences a persistent and uncontrollable worry about everyday situations, events, or activities. The worry is often disproportionate to the actual threat, as if the anxious person is exaggerating the seriousness or likelihood of what's happening.
- **Restlessness:** An anxious person can display a sense of restlessness or feeling on edge. Individuals with anxiety disorders may find it difficult to relax.
- **Fatigue:** Anxious people often find themselves feeling constantly tired or having low energy, even when there is no physical exertion. Even after sleeping, anxious folks may still feel fatigued, as if they received no rest at all.
- **Irritability:** Anxious people tend to easily become irritable or agitated, with heightened emotional reactions to stressors. It may seem as if the anxious person is reacting disproportionately to the situation at hand.
- **Muscle Tension:** Anxious people tend to tense up or clench their muscles tightly, often without realizing they're doing it. This causes physical symptoms such as muscle tension, tightness, or aches, especially in the neck, shoulders, or jaw.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Anxious people often struggle to sleep well. They may experience difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restless and disturbed sleep patterns, such as tossing and turning.

What is the number one thing that can make an anxiety problem worse?

The number one thing that can make an anxiety problem worse is ignoring it. Many anxious people assume their anxiety will disappear on its own, but this assumption is untrue.

Much like when a person tries to hide or ignore their emotions rather than actually feeling them, choosing to ignore anxiety can lead to similar negative outcomes.

Ignoring or hiding an anxiety problem may work in the short-term, but over time, anxiety that isn't properly addressed will grow into a larger problem.

The longer anxiety continues, the worse its symptoms can become—for example, an anxious person who isn't handling their anxiety well might lose a lot of sleep, experience aches and pains, and struggle to focus on anything they need to do. Over time, these symptoms can cause some major life issues.

These new issues can feed into the anxiety cycle, perpetuating the negative outcomes and symptoms further.

What are “triggers”? How can these make anxiety feel worse or heightened?

Triggers are anything that causes a person to spiral into a particular behavior—in this particular example, a trigger is something that makes a person's sense of anxiety skyrocket suddenly.

People with specific anxiety-inducing triggers are going to feel even more worried and anxious if they find themselves faced with their specific trigger. Triggers often vary from person to person—something that triggers one anxious person may not encourage the same reactions in another.

Though there are many different triggers, consider this example: A person who had a bad experience with clowns as a child may feel instantly anxious when they see a clown after that experience. They may feel triggered when they see a clown as an adult, even though the initial experience with the first clown happened many years ago.

How does anxiety differ between person to person?

There are a few main ways anxiety differs from person to person:

- Expression: Different people express anxiety in different ways. One person may be more outward and forthright about their anxiety; another may keep their anxiety issues quiet and private.
- Symptoms: The symptoms of anxiety vary greatly between different people. Some people may experience painful body aches, and another may feel queasy

the second anxiety sets in. Individual symptoms (or combinations of symptoms) can be different between everyone.

- Effects: Anxiety takes its toll on everyone who experiences it, but the effects can be quite different. Some people may struggle physically, while others struggle socially, and others struggle mentally.

What are some simple ways to ease anxiety in everyday situations?

Learning to quell anxiety is the first step toward conquering it for good. Consider taking baby steps toward easing anxiety by employing these simple strategies:

- Use sour candy as a distraction. When you feel a panic attack coming on, put a piece of sour candy in your mouth. The sudden burst of flavor can distract your mind away from the anxiety to this new stimulus, stopping a panic attack in its tracks.
- Develop a deep breathing routine. Practice taking in slow, deep breaths, holding them, and then slowly releasing them. While simple, this practice can help you regain control of your breathing during particularly anxious times.
- Identify your triggers. Understanding exactly what is causing your anxiety can help you talk yourself down from your feelings before they become overwhelming.
- Step away from particularly stressful moments. Give yourself permission to take a couple minutes to calm down and collect yourself. This simple effort can ease anxiety a little and help you refocus.

Can anxiety have a negative impact on your physical health?

There are quite a few ways that anxiety can negatively impact physical health, such as...

- Cardiovascular issues: It isn't uncommon for anxiety sufferers to have problems with a racing heartbeat or chest tightness. Over time, these symptoms can lead to bigger issues.
- Digestive issues: Anxiety can cause upset stomach, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, vomiting, and more.

- Muscle aches: Anxiety causes many people to tense or clench muscles. Over time, this constant state of being clenched or tensed can lead to muscle pains.
- Fatigue: Anxiety can lead to disrupted sleep patterns. This can cause a constant state of fatigue.

What can you do to be more accepting of an anxiety disorder diagnosis?

Accepting any kind of mental health diagnosis can be challenging. Consider these strategies to help yourself be more accepting of an anxiety disorder diagnosis.

- Remember that anxiety disorders are common. You aren't alone in this experience; many people know what you're experiencing.
- Anxiety disorders are real and valid. They aren't "made up" and many of them don't magically go away on their own. Your anxiety is real and struggling with it is a normal experience.
- You don't have to feel this way forever. There are proven treatments and strategies for anxiety disorders, and you can find a plan that will help you feel less anxious.

What happens if an anxiety disorder is left untreated?

Untreated anxiety disorders can lead to some serious consequences, such as...

- A Decreased Quality of Life: Persistent anxiety can diminish a person's overall quality of life. It may lead to a constant state of worry and distress, making it feel impossible to enjoy everyday activities and relationships.
- Impaired Relationships: Anxiety can strain relationships, as the constant worry and emotional reactivity may lead to misunderstandings, conflict, and difficulty in connecting with others. Many anxious people experience exaggerated worries, and other people may not understand why they worry so much, which can lead to problems.
- Social Isolation: Some people dealing with untreated anxiety may engage in avoidance behaviors, withdrawing from social activities or situations that trigger

anxiety. This can contribute to social isolation and loneliness. Rather than face a potentially anxiety-inducing situation, they prefer to isolate themselves.

- **Negative Impact on Work or School Performance:** Untreated anxiety can affect concentration, focus, and decision-making. This may result in decreased productivity at work or school, which can lead to major challenges and missed opportunities.
- **Physical Health Issues:** Chronic, untreated anxiety can take a toll on physical health. It has been linked to increased risk of cardiovascular issues, gastrointestinal problems, muscle pains, and more.

Are therapists and medications really necessary to combat issues with anxiety?

This is largely dependent on the person with anxiety. In some cases, people can resolve their anxiety issues independently. However, there are many instances where attending therapy or talking to a doctor about taking an anxiety medication are the best course of action.

If an anxiety issue becomes so persistent that it affects a person's quality of life, then they should strongly consider speaking with a mental health professional.

They will be able to suggest a good course of action—whether that involves engaging in cognitive behavioral therapy, speaking to a doctor about medication, and beyond.

1. How long do problems with anxiety last?

The length of time an anxiety problem lasts is largely dependent on the person experiencing them, though there are a variety of factors that can also determine the length of an anxiety issue, such as...

- Whether or not a person follows through on a recommended treatment plan, such as taking medication, attending therapy sessions, or engaging in healthy coping strategies. If an anxious person takes their prescribed anxiety medications irregularly, it can cause their anxiety issues to persist. Not following through with relaxation techniques and exercises can cause anxiety to continue.

- Whether or not a person decides to acknowledge their anxiety is a problem. If a person doesn't believe their anxiety is an issue, it will be allowed to perpetuate (and likely become worse) over time.
- Whether or not a person decides to make lifestyle changes that will calm anxious feelings. For example, if a person continues to do whatever it is that is feeding their anxiety, like staying in a bad relationship, abusing substances, or staying in an unhealthy work situation, then their anxiety will last longer.

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