

## Understanding Anxiety

Everyone experiences a degree of anxiety at various times. Although it is highly treatable, only a third of those suffering from anxiety seek treatment. Anxiety develops from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events. Anxiety is the most common mental health condition in the United States, affecting 40 million adults ages 18 and older.



### What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear, nervousness, or dread that may be accompanied by physical manifestations. Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress and can be beneficial in some situations. It can alert us to dangers and help us prepare and pay attention. Anxiety disorders differ from "normal" nervousness or anxiousness. An anxiety disorder is diagnosed when feelings become excessive and persistent, and symptoms interfere with daily life, in areas such as work, school, and relationships. Depression and anxiety disorders frequently occur together. They may have similar symptoms, which can be hard to tell apart.

### Symptoms

Common symptoms of anxiety include, but are not limited to:

#### Emotional/cognitive symptoms:

- Feelings of apprehension or dread
- Feeling tense or jumpy
- Restlessness or irritability

- Anticipating the worst and being watchful for signs of danger
- Difficulty concentrating or feeling numb
- Avoidance behavior

#### Physical symptoms:

- Pounding, racing heart and shortness of breath
- Sweating, tremors, and twitches
- Headaches, fatigue, and insomnia
- Upset stomach, frequent urination, or diarrhea
- Muscle tension, aches, and soreness

### Treatment

There are many ways to treat anxiety. Treatment generally involves psychotherapy, medication, or both. According to Dr. Julia Kim, HSS Clinical Psychologist, "Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is one of the most effective forms of treatment. CBT is done alone or in combination with other therapies, and can help you quickly become aware of how you think about troubling challenging situations, so that you can respond to them

in a more effective way." People should work with their health care provider to choose the treatment that is best for them.

### Prevention

Whether or not you have a professional diagnosis of an anxiety disorder, you might try some lifestyle changes that can lower anxiety and help to support a healthy lifestyle.

- Limit or avoid caffeine
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Quit smoking
- Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs
- Maintain regular, adequate sleep
- Exercise
- Use social support
- Learn stress and relaxation techniques

**Please consult a healthcare provider if you feel that anxiety interferes with your daily living.**