



Anxiety is common. Around 1 in 10 young Australians aged between 18-25 will experience an anxiety disorder in any given 12 month period, whilst for young people between the ages of 13-17, the figure is around 1 in 25. A person's ability to achieve their full potential can be seriously reduced if he/she does not receive treatment for an anxiety disorder.

What's anxiety and when is it an illness?

Anxiety is worry. It is an unpleasant emotion that we all feel when we are faced with challenges. Anxiety, at times, can be useful as it helps us prepare for and perform tasks. When anxiety becomes an illness it is called an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders occur when the anxiety becomes intense, causes distress, lasts a certain amount of time (not just a few days) and affects day to day living.

It is normal for our bodies to prepare us for challenges by giving us an increased heart rate, increased breathing rate, muscle tension, sweats, shakes and a feeling of butterflies in the stomach (this often happens when making a speech or preparing for a test/exam), this is anxiety. People with anxiety disorders can experience these physical sensations often or can have repeated occurrences, called panic attacks.

Other common symptoms of anxiety disorders are:

- > Persistent worrying and excessive fears
- > Inability to relax
- > Avoidance of feared situations
- > Excessive shyness
- > Social isolation or being withdrawn
- > Difficulty concentrating and paying attention
- > Poor sleep
- > Problems with work, social or family life

Types of anxiety disorder

There are many different types of anxiety disorders. Including:

> Specific phobias:

Intense and irrational fear of a specific situation or object. This fear often leads to the person trying to avoid the situation or object.

> Panic disorder:

The presence of repeated, unexpected panic attacks and worry about having another panic attack.

> Social phobia:

marked and persistent fear of being embarrassed in social situations. This fear is unreasonable and excessive. Fear and worry about being judged badly by other people, being criticised or "put down".

> Obsessive-compulsive disorder:

Experiencing repeated obsessions (unwanted thoughts and impulses) and/or compulsions (urge to act a certain way or complete a task) that creates distress or impairment. Common obsessions can involve worries about contamination or contagious diseases. Common compulsions are handwashing, counting objects and arranging things in a specific pattern.

> Post-traumatic stress disorder:

Experiencing certain symptoms following a traumatic event. The symptoms can be replaying unwanted memories, difficulties sleeping, and/or regularly checking for danger.

> Generalised anxiety disorder:

Lots of worry or anxiety about a number of things, such as work, money, relationships.

Other problems

Many young people who develop anxiety problems may also become quite depressed about their problem and may, at the same time, suffer from a depressive disorder.

Some young people may drink alcohol or take drugs to ease the discomfort of anxiety or to make them feel more

confident. Taking drugs can make the feelings associated with anxiety much worse after the initial feelings of being "numbed" or sedated. Drinking alcohol or taking drugs can lead to dependence where someone cannot function without these substances and can cause long term physical and mental problems.

A person's ability to achieve their full potential can be seriously reduced if he/she does not receive treatment for an anxiety disorder.

What can you do as a young person with an anxiety disorder?

Tell family and friends about your difficulties so they can be there to support you. Try to eat healthily, exercise and find ways to relax by listening to music, reading, and doing activities that you enjoy. Avoid alcohol and drugs as they often make anxiety worse in the long run and can lead to addiction problems. It may also be beneficial to seek professional help from a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist or local doctor.

The different anxiety disorders require slightly different approaches to treatment. One of the most commonly used treatments for disorders such as panic disorder, social phobia and generalised anxiety disorder is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT is based on the idea that moods/emotions are created by thoughts and it explores thinking patterns and how they can affect our emotions, such as fear, in a negative and positive way. In certain instances medication may also be required.

Advice and Referral

If you are working with a young person who you think may have an anxiety disorder and you are not sure what to do, it is always best to contact someone with experience in this field and discuss the situation with them. Referral to a GP (local doctor), a trained counselor or specialist mental health worker may be necessary.

What can you do to support someone with an anxiety disorder?

- > A person with an anxiety disorder requires understanding and support to get help. It sometimes helps to remember it is a medical condition.
- > Treatment for anxiety is effective so assist the young person in accessing treatment. Be patient and listen to the young person's fears and concerns. It usually makes things worse telling someone to calm down – it's not that easy.
- > Be prepared to seek help or support for yourself as well.



Services at Orygen Youth Health - Clinical Program (OYH-CP) www.oyh.org.au

Orygen Youth Health Clinical Program is able to assist some young people (15-24) with anxiety disorders who live in Western or Northwestern Melbourne.

To make a referral or get some advice contact the **OYH-CP** Triage worker on 1800 888 320 or via the paging service on 03 9483 4556.

For children and teenagers under 15 years of age living in Western or Northwestern Metropolitan Melbourne contact RCH Mental Health Service on 1800 445 511.

For further information regarding mental health and information in other languages visit:

- > www.beyondblue.com.au
- > www.reachout.com.au
- > www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- > www.sane.org.au
- > www.healthinsite.gov.au

This information is to be used in conjunction with the information your doctor/health professional provides. It is not to be used in place of your health professional's advice. If you have concerns or are worried about side effects or dosage please contact your health professional.