

# JUST THE FACTS: Anxiety

## UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

Many different words are used to describe the feeling of anxiety. Anxiety is often described as motivation, excitement, tension, stress, worry, nerves and phobias. Anxiety can be a normal reaction to new and positive challenges or stressful events. Anxiety can also be the result of faulty thinking and other controllable causes that become problematic and interfere with life and health. **Everyone has felt anxious at some time in life. Anxiety is experienced in a number of ways including:**

- Butterflies in your stomach before a big date
- Knots in your stomach when your supervisor is upset
- Pounding heart when you hear a strange noise outside your home

In some situations, anxiety is very useful. Anxiety is a sign that tells the body that it should be on alert. Anxiety helps to prepare a person for action. Anxiety can motivate you to study for an exam and work hard to keep a supervisor happy. Anxiety can signal you to act, which may help you cope with a difficult situation.

### Are you a worrier?

Worrying is a form of anxiety. Worry can be a natural response to life conditions. Everyone worries about something at some time. However, worry becomes problematic when its associated behaviors interfere with the ability to live a happy, healthy life.

Signs that worry might be problematic in your life:

- You are chronically on alert and thinking about potential future dangers or threats
- You are consistently making negative predictions about the future
- You tend to overestimate the likelihood that something bad will happen
- You repeat worried thoughts over and over again in your head

### When is anxiety a problem?

Some amount of anxiety is normal. However, an anxiety disorder can keep a person from coping with the ups and downs of life. An anxiety disorder can make a person feel anxious most of the time without any particular cause. In some cases, the anxious feelings may be so uncomfortable that an individual will do anything necessary to avoid those feelings including stopping or changing everyday activities. Anxiety can become so severe that it prevents a person from leaving his or her home. Severe anxiety can prevent a person from going to work or engaging in meaningful activities with friends and family.



The focus of healthy worry is problem-solving, while the focus of unhealthy worry is catastrophic thinking.

Take an anonymous online screening at [AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/topics-anxiety](https://AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/topics-anxiety)  
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## What are the most common types of anxiety disorders?

The anxiety disorders that interfere with life are generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, social anxiety disorder, phobias, and posttraumatic stress disorder. You can find information about each of these online at:

[nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/index.shtml](http://nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/index.shtml).

## Who is at risk?

Anxiety-related problems can affect anyone. In fact, nearly 29 percent of all adults in the United States experience an anxiety disorder at some point. About 18 percent of American adults have an anxiety disorder in any given year. Individuals with one type of anxiety disorder are at a greater risk for other types of anxiety disorders and related problems.

## Can anxiety problems be treated?

Yes. The first step to recovery is understanding the causes of anxiety disorders, the symptoms, and the factors that can make anxiety disorders worse. Treatments include cognitive behavioral therapies, medication or a combination of the two. Treatment can be very effective when offered by health care professionals who are specifically trained to treat anxiety disorders.

## How does anxiety affect family members?

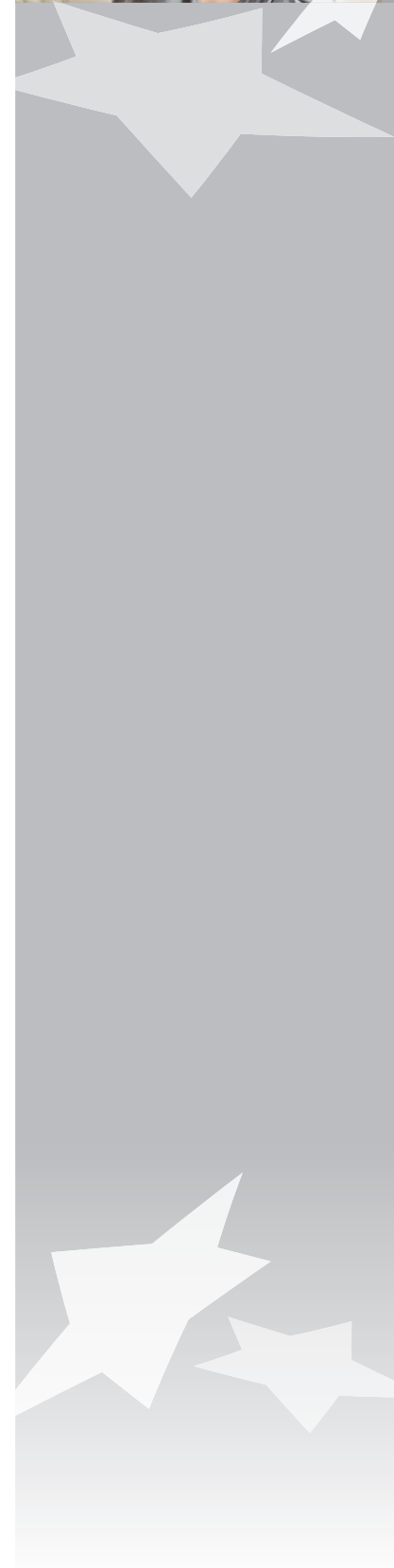
Anxiety symptoms are wide-ranging and affect people in almost all areas of their lives, so it is no surprise that anxiety can affect relationships with family, significant others and friends. Anxiety disorders can be stressful for family members, too.

### Social isolation

People with anxiety disorders often avoid stressful situations or public places. They may want to be alone and may not want to engage in activities outside the home. This avoidance may inhibit family activities and reduce the number and quality of interactions with family and friends.

### Chronic tension

People with anxiety disorders often feel restless and tense. Family members feel that tension too, and often don't know how to respond. Family members sometimes describe their experience as "walking on eggshells" around an individual with an anxiety disorder. Tension in the family can interfere with communication and family relationships.





## What can I do if a family member has anxiety problems?

### Engage in empathy

Try to see the world through the eyes of your anxious family member. A person with anxiety may see the world as a scary place. Understanding these fears can help you empathize with what your family member is going through.

### Gather information

Take time to talk to your family member to learn more about his or her anxiety. Then do some research to learn even more. You can find helpful information at [nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/index.shtml](http://nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/index.shtml).

### Get involved

Encourage your family member to get help. If your family member consents, you can show support and get more information about his or her anxiety disorder by attending appointments together. Anxious individuals may have difficulty concentrating and responding to multiple sources of information. You can help by listening to information your anxious family member may not be able to retain.

### For More Information

For more information about anxiety and how your family can help, visit [AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/topics-anxiety](http://AfterDeployment.dcoe.mil/topics-anxiety).

