Anxiety Disorders
By KSU Counseling Services Staff

Preview Points
- Anxiety disorders affect more than 25 million Americans. It is the most common sort of emotional disorders.
- The main types of anxiety disorders are the following: panic disorders, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Anxiety disorders are not normal feelings of nervousness. Rather, untreated anxiety disorders push people to avoid situations that worsen their anxiety symptoms.
- Many people with anxiety disorders abuse alcohol or drugs to “gain relief”.

SYMPTOMS:
- “Overwhelming feelings of panic and fear
- Uncontrollable obsessive thoughts
- Painful, intrusive memories
- Recurring nightmares
- Physical symptoms such as feeling “sick to your stomach,” butterflies, heart pounding, startling easily, and muscle tension” (“Let’s talk facts about anxiety disorders,” 2005, n.p.)

TYPES OF ANXIETY DISORDERS:

PANIC DISORDERS: A panic attack involves an overwhelming combination of physical and psychological distress, with some of the following symptoms: “pounding heart or chest pain; sweating, trembling, shaking; shortness of breath, sensation of choking; nausea or abdominal pain; dizziness or lightheadedness; feeling unreal or disconnected; fear of losing control, ‘going crazy,’ or dying; numbness, (and) chills or hot flashes”. (“Let’s talk facts about anxiety disorders,” 2005, n.p.) These symptoms may be so severe that some people may think they are having a heart attack or other life-threatening illness.

PHOBIAS: Phobias refer to persistent fears of specific objects, situations or activities. Specific phobias refer to fears of objects that are generally not harmful. Social phobias (social anxiety disorders) may involve anxiety and discomfort. Agoraphobia refers to the fear of being in situations where escape may be “difficult or embarrassing”.

OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD): This refers to upsetting and irrational thoughts that may cause anxiety and that cannot be controlled through reasoning. People with OCD may engage in repeated behaviors: “repeated hand-washing, constant rechecking to satisfy doubts, and following rigid rules of order”. The OCD behaviors may be so severe that they interfere with daily life and social relationships.
POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD): People who have survived a severe physical or emotional event (like natural disasters, personal tragedies, physical or sexual abuse during childhood, witnessing others’ injuries, military combat, and violent personal attacks) may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. The symptoms of PTSD may involve recurrent nightmares, intrusive memories, and flashbacks. They may feel extreme distress when reminded of the traumatic event and will go to extreme lengths to avoid that situation. PTSD symptoms may include the following symptoms, too: “feeling numb or detached, trouble sleeping, feeling jittery or on guard, and irritability.”

Anxiety disorders are treatable.

Concluding Points

- Anxiety disorders affect many Americans.
- The four main types of anxiety disorders include the following: panic disorders, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Anxiety disorders may be treated by professionals.

References

“Let’s talk facts about anxiety disorders.”

Body text