



SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

More than just shyness

Are you afraid of being judged by others? Are you self-conscious in everyday social situations? Do you avoid meeting new people due to fear or anxiety? If you have been feeling this way for at least 6 months and these feelings make it hard for you to do everyday tasks—such as talking to people at work or school—you may have social anxiety disorder.

Social anxiety disorder is an intense, persistent fear of being watched and judged by others. This fear can affect work, school, and other daily activities. It can even make it hard to make and keep friends. The good news is social anxiety disorder is treatable. Learn more about the symptoms of social anxiety disorder and how to find help.

What is it

Social anxiety disorder is a common type of anxiety disorder. A person with social anxiety disorder feels symptoms of anxiety or fear in situations where they may be scrutinized, evaluated, or judged by others, such as speaking in public, meeting new people, dating, being on a job interview, answering a question in class, or having to talk to a cashier in a store. Doing everyday things, such as eating or drinking in front of others or using a public restroom, also may cause anxiety or fear due to concerns about being humiliated, judged, and rejected.

The fear that people with social anxiety disorder have in social situations is so intense that they feel it is beyond their control. For some people, this fear may get in the way of going to work, attending school, or doing everyday things. Other people may be able to accomplish these activities but experience a great deal of fear or anxiety when they do. People with social anxiety disorder may worry about engaging in social situations for weeks before they happen. Sometimes, they end up avoiding places or events that cause distress or generate feelings of embarrassment.

Social anxiety disorder usually starts during late childhood and may resemble extreme shyness or avoidance of situations or social interactions. It occurs more frequently in females than in males, and this gender difference is more pronounced in adolescents and young adults. Without treatment, social anxiety disorder can last for many years, or even a lifetime.

Signs & Symptoms

When having to perform in front of or be around others, people with social anxiety disorder may:

- Blush, sweat, or tremble.
- Have a rapid heart rate.
- Feel their “mind going blank,” or feel sick to their stomach.
- Have a rigid body posture, or speak with an overly soft voice.
- Find it difficult to make eye contact, be around people they don’t know, or talk to people in social situations, even when they want to.
- Feel self-consciousness or fear that people will judge them negatively.
- Avoid places where there are other people.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US

Iroquois Center for Human Development
(620) 723 - 2272



SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

How is it treated?

If you're concerned you may have symptoms of social anxiety disorder, talk to a health care provider. After discussing your history, a health care provider may conduct a physical exam to ensure that an unrelated physical problem is not causing your symptoms. A health care provider may refer you to a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, or clinical social worker. The first step to effective treatment is to get a diagnosis, usually from a mental health professional.

Social anxiety disorder is generally treated with psychotherapy (sometimes called "talk therapy"), medication, or both. Speak with a health care provider about the best treatment for you.

Psychotherapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), a research-supported type of psychotherapy, is commonly used to treat social anxiety disorder. CBT teaches you different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to situations to help you feel less anxious and fearful. CBT also can help you learn and practice social skills, which is very important for treating social anxiety disorder. CBT has been well studied and is the gold standard for psychotherapy.

Exposure therapy is a CBT method that focuses on progressively confronting the fears underlying an anxiety disorder to help you engage in activities you have been avoiding. Exposure therapy is sometimes used along with relaxation exercises. CBT delivered in a group therapy format also can offer unique benefits for social anxiety disorder.

Another treatment option for social anxiety disorder is acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). ACT takes a different approach than CBT to negative thoughts and uses strategies such as mindfulness and goal setting to reduce your discomfort and anxiety. Compared to CBT, ACT is a newer form of psychotherapy treatment, so less data are available on its effectiveness. However, different therapies work for different types of people, so it can be helpful to discuss what form of therapy may be right for you with a mental health professional.

Medication

Health care providers may prescribe medication to treat social anxiety disorder. Different types of medication can be effective in treating this disorder, including:

- Antidepressants, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs)
- Beta-blockers
- Anti-anxiety medications, such as benzodiazepines

SSRI and SNRI antidepressants are commonly used to treat depression, but they also can help treat the symptoms of social anxiety disorder. They may take several weeks to start working. Antidepressants may also cause side effects, such as headaches, nausea, or difficulty sleeping. These side effects are usually not severe, especially if the dose starts off low and is increased slowly over time. Talk to your health care provider about any side effects that you may experience.

Beta-blockers can help control some of the physical symptoms of social anxiety disorder, such as rapid heart rate, sweating, and tremors. Beta-blockers are commonly the medication of choice for the "performance anxiety" type of social anxiety disorder.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US

Iroquois Center for Human Development
(620) 723 - 2272

Source: National Institute of Mental Health



SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

How is it treated? (cont.)

Benzodiazepines, which are anti-anxiety sedative medications, are powerful and begin working right away to reduce anxious feelings. These medications can be very effective in rapidly decreasing anxiety, but some people build up a tolerance to them and need higher and higher doses to get the same effect. Some people even become dependent on them. Therefore, a health care provider may prescribe them only for brief periods of time if you need them.

Both psychotherapy and medication can take some time to work. Many people try more than one medication before finding the best one for them. A health care provider can work with you to find the best medication, dose, and duration of treatment for you. People with social anxiety disorder usually obtain the best results with a combination of medication and CBT or other psychotherapies.

Support Groups

Many people with social anxiety find support groups helpful. In a group of people who all have social anxiety disorder, you can receive unbiased, honest feedback about how others in the group see you. This way, you can learn that your thoughts about judgment and rejection are not true or are distorted. You also can learn how others with social anxiety disorder approach and overcome the fear of social situations.

Support groups are available both in person and online. However, any advice you receive from a support group member should be used cautiously and does not replace treatment recommendations from a health care provider.

Both psychotherapy and medication can take some time to work. A healthy lifestyle also can help combat anxiety. Make sure to get enough sleep and exercise, eat a healthy diet, and turn to family and friends who you trust for support.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US

Iroquois Center for Human Development
(620) 723 - 2272

Source: National Institute of Mental Health