

Fact Sheet: Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)

Description: Of the 40 million American age 18 and older who suffer from anxiety disorders, approximately 6.8%, or 15 million, suffer from Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). SAD is characterized by intense fear of situations, usually social or performance situations, where embarrassment may occur. Individuals with this disorder are acutely aware of the physical signs of their anxiety and fear that others will notice, judge them, and think poorly of them. This fear often results in extreme anxiety in anticipation of an activity, a panic attack when faced with an activity, or avoidance of an activity altogether. Adults usually recognize that their fears are unfounded or excessive, but suffer them nonetheless.

People with SAD tend to be sensitive to criticism and rejection, have difficulty asserting themselves, and suffer from low self-esteem. The most common fears associated with the disorder are fear of speaking in public or to strangers, fear of meeting new people, and performance fears, such as writing, eating or drinking in public. Sufferers usually fear more than one type of social setting. Symptoms of SAD often manifest themselves physically and can include:

- ◆ palpitations
- ◆ tremors
- ◆ sweating
- ◆ diarrhea
- ◆ confusion
- ◆ blushing – particularly common in social situations; often causes the sufferer further embarrassment

Diagnosis and onset: Usually occurs in mid-to-late adolescence, but children have also been diagnosed with SAD. Children with the disorder are prone to excessive shyness, clinging behavior, tantrums, and even selective mutism. There is usually a marked decline in school performance and the child will often try to avoid going to school or taking part in age-appropriate social activities. The child's fears are centered on peer settings rather than on social activities involving adults, with whom he or she may feel more comfortable. For a child to be diagnosed with SAD, symptoms must persist for at least 6 months.