

Social Anxiety Disorder



The Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety disorders and to improve the lives of all people who suffer from them. Help ADAA help others. Donate now at www.adaa.org.

For information visit www.adaa.org or contact

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“ I’m so anxious around people that my heart beats out of control. I sweat and my face gets red. I just know everyone is staring at me when my voice cracks, and I can’t say one word. ”

What is social anxiety disorder?

Most of us feel anxious before making a presentation, asking someone on a date, or going on a job interview. Butterflies in your stomach, sweaty palms, and pounding heart are normal responses to a new or intimidating social situation. But 15 million American adults with social anxiety disorder experience an intense fear of being scrutinized and negatively evaluated by others in social or performance situations. Some literally feel sick from fear while ordering food in a restaurant, signing their name in public, making a phone call, or other seemingly nonthreatening situations.

Although they recognize that the fear is excessive and unreasonable, people with social anxiety disorder, also called social phobia, feel powerless against their anxiety. They are terrified of being embarrassed or humiliated.

Physical symptoms may include blushing, sweating, trembling, nausea, rapid heartbeat,

shortness of breath, dizziness, and headaches.

About 20 percent of people with this disorder also suffer from alcohol abuse or dependence. Although alcohol can temporarily reduce symptoms, even moderate amounts can increase anxiety, irritability, or depression.

What's the difference between normal anxiety and social anxiety disorder?

Normal Anxiety	Social Anxiety Disorder
Feeling anxious before making a presentation, leading a meeting, or asking for a raise	Turning down a well-earned promotion that might involve public speaking
Feeling shy or awkward when walking into a room full of strangers	Feeling too anxious to attend your office holiday party
Feeling nervous or the jitters before a blind date	Refusing a social invitation for fear of embarrassing yourself

About Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is normal. It helps us get out of harm's way and prepare for important events. It warns us when we need to take action. But if you have anxiety that is persistent, irrational, and overwhelming and interferes with daily activities, you may have an anxiety disorder.

The term "anxiety disorders" refers to generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias.

For more information, visit www.adaa.org.

How can social anxiety disorder affect your life?

Social anxiety disorder can disrupt family life, reduce self-esteem, and limit work efficiency. For some, it can be socially and economically devastating. It may make it difficult to complete school, interview and obtain a job, and develop friendships and romantic relationships.

The disorder is often selective. Some people may have an intense fear of talking to a salesperson or giving a speech, but they may be comfortable in other similar settings. Other people may become anxious during routine activities such as starting a conversation with a stranger or a person in authority, participating in meetings or classes, or dating and attending parties.

What causes social anxiety disorder?

Studies suggest that biological, genetic, and environmental factors play a role. Equally common among men and women, the disorder typically begins around age 13, sometimes emerging out of a childhood history of shyness. It appears to run in families.

What treatments are available?

Most people find significant improvement with professional care. Many forms of treatment are available, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), relaxation techniques, medication, and combination therapy, which includes behavioral therapy and medications.

Learn more about treatment at www.adaa.org.

There is no single best treatment. What works for one person may not be the best choice for someone else. A course of treatment should be tailored to your individual needs. Ask your doctor to explain why a particular type of treatment is being recommended, what other



“I was so relieved when my doctor put a name to my problem, to discover that there are other people like me, to learn that there is hope.”

options are available, and what you need to do to fully participate in your recovery.

How can ADAA help you?

Suffering from social anxiety disorder can interfere with many aspects of your life. ADAA can provide the resources that will help you and your loved ones better understand your condition, connect you with a community of people who know what you are experiencing, and assist you in finding mental health professionals who can help.

Visit ADAA at www.adaa.org to locate doctors and therapists who treat anxiety disorders as well as local support groups. Learn about the causes, symptoms, and treatments for anxiety disorders; review questions to ask a therapist or doctor; and find helpful materials to help family and loved ones. ADAA is here to help you make the best decisions so that you can get on with your life.

Take Five & Manage Your Anxiety

You are not alone. Talk to someone – a friend, loved one or doctor. Get help. Anxiety disorders are real, serious, and treatable.

Whether you have normal anxiety or an anxiety disorder, these strategies will help you cope:

Exercise. Go for a walk or jog. Do yoga. Dance. Just get moving!

Talk to someone... spouse, significant other, friend, child, or doctor.

Keep a daily journal. Become aware of what triggers your anxiety.

Eat a balanced diet. Don't skip meals. Avoid caffeine, which can trigger anxiety symptoms.

Contact ADAA at www.adaa.org. Let us help you help yourself.

Social Anxiety Disorder Self-Test

If you suspect that you might suffer from social anxiety disorder, answer the questions below, and share them with your health care professional.

Are you troubled by the following?

- Y N An intense and persistent fear of a social situation in which other people might judge you
- Y N Fear that you will be humiliated by your actions
- Y N Fear that people will notice that you are blushing, sweating, trembling, or showing other signs of anxiety
- Y N Knowing that your fear is excessive or unreasonable

Does the feared situation cause you to...

- Y N always feel anxious?
- Y N experience a panic attack, during which you suddenly are overcome by intense fear or discomfort, including any of these symptoms?
- pounding heart
 - sweating
 - trembling or shaking
 - shortness of breath
 - choking
 - chest pain
 - nausea or abdominal discomfort
 - "jelly" legs

- dizziness
- feelings of unreality or being detached from yourself
- fear of losing control, going crazy
- fear of dying
- numbness or tingling sensations
- chills or hot flushes

- Y N go to great lengths to avoid participating?
- Y N have your symptoms interfere with your daily life?

Having more than one illness at the same time can make it difficult to diagnose and treat the different conditions. Depression and substance abuse are among the conditions that occasionally complicate social anxiety disorder.

- Y N Have you experienced changes in sleeping or eating habits?

More days than not, do you feel...

- Y N sad or depressed?
- Y N disinterested in life?
- Y N worthless or guilty?

During the last year, has the use of alcohol or drugs...

- Y N resulted in failure with work, school, or family?
- Y N placed you in a dangerous situation, such as driving under the influence?
- Y N gotten you arrested?
- Y N continued despite causing problems for you or your loved ones?