

Signs and symptoms of anxiety

Anxiety can be a very normal response to stressful or dangerous situations. It is often called fight or flight mode and can help us take action to avoid danger.

For example, the 'nagging' feeling that makes us work hard and prepare for an important meeting or presentation is of course very useful in this situation and we wouldn't want to get rid of it completely. Once the meeting or presentation is over, the feelings of anxiety should leave us and we should be able to go back to our usual day-to-day routines.

What is an anxiety disorder?

Someone might have an anxiety disorder if:

- anxious or worrying feelings may last for weeks without getting any better
- the feelings make getting on with everyday life difficult such as going to work or maintaining relationships
- sometimes there's no obvious reason to feel anxious.

Signs and symptoms of anxiety

People with anxiety, might experience signs and symptoms such as:

- emotional or non-physical symptoms; excessively fearing and worrying about past and future situations (that do not really pose a threat)
- physical symptoms; aches and pains from muscle tension, feeling sick, feeling restless, trouble sleeping and experiencing panic attacks
- behavioural symptoms; avoiding situations or places that cause anxiety or using more alcohol and other drugs.

Sometimes severe anxiety can develop over time and we may not even notice, and some of the above symptoms can also be symptoms of other medical conditions therefore it's recommended to see a GP.

Causes of anxiety

The development of severe anxiety has often several causes not just one. There are a range of biological, psychological and social factors that are linked to severe anxiety, such as:

- personality - especially people who have a more sensitive emotional nature and tend to see the world as a threatening place
- one or more stressful events that are ongoing; work stress, family and relationship problems, experiencing shock after an traumatic event
- family background, a difficult childhood (experiencing physical, emotional or sexual abuse as a child) or a family history of anxiety disorders
- medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and asthma have been associated with anxiety conditions
- drug and alcohol use can both lead and be a result from anxiety.

For more information about treatment for anxiety, check out the **Treatments for Anxiety and Depression Information Sheet**.

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.