



# Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

A LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND  
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## FACTS ABOUT ANXIETY DISORDERS

Most people experience feelings of anxiety before an important event such as a big exam, business presentation or first date. Anxiety disorders, however, are illnesses that cause people to feel frightened, distressed and uneasy for no apparent reason. Left untreated, these disorders can dramatically reduce productivity and significantly diminish an individual's quality of life. Fortunately, through research conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), there are effective treatments that can help. NIMH is conducting a national education campaign to increase awareness of these disorders and their treatments.

### How Common are Anxiety Disorders ?

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in America ; more than 23 million people are affected by these disorders each year.
- Anxiety disorders cost the US \$ 46.6 billion in 1990 in direct and indirect costs, nearly one-third of the nation's total mental health bill of \$ 148 billion.

### What are the Different Kinds of Anxiety Disorders ?

**Panic Disorder** - Characterized by panic attacks, sudden feelings of terror that strike repeatedly and without warning. Physical symptoms include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, abdominal discomfort, feelings of unreality and fear of dying.

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder** - Repeated, intrusive and unwanted thoughts or rituals that seem impossible to control.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** - Persistent symptoms that occur after experiencing a traumatic event such as war, rape, child abuse, natural disasters or being taken hostage. Nightmares, flashbacks, numbing of emotions, depression, and feeling angry, irritable, distracted and being easily startled are common symptoms.

**Phobia** - Extreme, irrational and sometimes disabling fear of something that poses little or no real danger ; the fear leads to avoidance of objects or situations and can cause people to limit their lives.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder** - Chronic, exaggerated worry about everyday routine life events and activities lasting at least six months ; almost always anticipating the worst even though there is little reason to expect it. Accompanied by physical symptoms such as fatigue, trembling, muscle tension, headache and / or nausea.

### What are the Treatments for Anxiety Disorders ?

Treatments have been largely developed through research conducted by NIMH and other research institutions. They are extremely effective and often combine medication or specific types of psychotherapy

More medications are available than ever before to effectively treat anxiety disorders. These include antidepressants or benzodiazepines (anti-anxiety medications). If one medication is not effective, others can be tried. New medications are currently under development to treat anxiety symptoms.

The two most effective forms of psychotherapy used to treat anxiety disorders are behavioral therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy. **Behavioral therapy** tries to change actions through techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing or through gradual exposure to the feared object or situation. In addition to these techniques, **cognitive-behavioral therapy** teaches patients to understand their thinking patterns so they can react differently to the situations that cause them anxiety.

### **Is it possible for Anxiety Disorders to coexist with other physical or mental disorders ?**

It is common for an anxiety disorder to accompany another anxiety disorder, or in some cases, depression, eating disorders or substance abuse. Anxiety disorders can also coexist with physical disorders. In such instances, these disorders will also need to be treated. Before undergoing any treatment, it is important to have a thorough medical exam to rule out other possible causes.