

Sheila Jenkins, Ph.D.

Psychologist

5821 Southwest Freeway, Suite 380

Houston, Texas 77057

713 266-9837

Anxiety

Definition of Anxiety

Some level of anxiety is normal under certain situations; however, millions of people suffer from unhealthy and unnatural anxiety or irrational fears. Anxiety is a vague sense of apprehension or impending fear that something unknown is going to happen. The focus of anxiety is more internal than external. It is usually a response to a vague, distant, or even unrecognizable or unidentifiable danger. Thus, anxiety is a subjective state of apprehension and uneasiness. Sometimes, anxiety tends to come out of no where, for no reason, peaks to a high level very rapidly, then subsides gradually. Anxiety is a powerful force that dominates and disrupts your enjoyment of life. A person may experience unhealthy anxiety occasionally or daily. The patient may dread a particular situation that is perceived as stressful. When someone experiences anxiety, they report feelings of fear, insecurity, powerlessness or paranoia. During severe states of anxiety, others report feelings of helplessness or hopelessness. Anxiety interferes with performance at work or school, interferes with a person's ability to socialize with others, and negatively impact relationships with family members and friends.

Examples of Anxiety

The following is a small example of actual statements made by patients who suffer from anxiety:

"I can't go to parties because I get so nervous and my hands sweat a lot."

"Even though my boss has told me that my job is safe, I constantly worry about getting laid off."

"Since my grandmother died, I think about dying all the time. I canceled my flight last week because I thought the plane would crash."

"My job requires me to make presentations in front of a group of people. Last month, just before I walked into the room to speak I had butterflies, my hands were shaking really bad and then I threw up. I just couldn't do it!"

"After watching the news and hearing about the horrible things happening to other people, I can't sleep. I check the front door several times to make sure it's locked. Now, I'm checking all the windows to make sure they're locked. I feel so tired in the morning because I wake up whenever I hear a sound."

Levels of Anxiety

Mild

- increased awareness
- mild degree of worry
- slight irritability or nervousness
- slight impaired concentration
- feeling faint
- slight increase in vital signs
- shortness of breath
- mild to moderate restlessness

Moderate

- headaches
- nausea
- sweating
- heightening tension
- alert, but focus narrows
- concentration decreases
- frequent urination
- heart palpitations
- restlessness
- insomnia
- perceptions begin to alter
- slight increase in vital signs
- numbness or tingling in hands or feet
- trembling or shaking
- shortness of breath
- decreased communication

Severe

- distorted perceptions
- distorted communication
- unable to think clearly
- diarrhea
- heart palpitations (rapid or irregular)
- sweating
- dizziness
- nausea or vomiting
- intense feeling of dread or threat
- clenched jaws
- dramatic increase in vital signs
- hot or cold flashes
- trembling or shaking
- choking feeling
- difficulty breathing
- dry mouth
- muscle tension
- chest pain
- cold or clammy hands
- pacing

Panic (Extremely Severe)

- feelings of terror
- unable to communicate
- shortness of breath or feeling of being smothered
- cannot carry out activities of daily living
- distorted reality
- cannot attend to details
- easily startled
- chest pain
- trembling or shaking
- fight/flight instincts take over
- potential for violence toward self and others
- increasing vital signs in early stage of panic but vital signs may suddenly drop in panic sustained without relief or treatment

Treatment of Anxiety

Anxiety is a serious illness that should be treated. If you believe that you suffer from a form of anxiety, contact a psychologist, psychiatrist, or primary care physician for help. Treatment of anxiety will require a lifestyle change on your part. In counseling, you will learn strategies and skills to improve your condition. Psychologists help patients to identify and minimize the thoughts or feelings that lead to anxiety. For the successful treatment of anxiety, psychologists recommend the implementation of relaxation exercises, cognitive behavioral techniques, physical exercise and a healthy diet. A regular fitness program helps to reduce blood pressure, decrease cholesterol levels, and improve blood sugar regulation. A good diet that eliminates caffeine, sugar and nicotine is extremely helpful in reducing anxiety as well. In some cases, an anti-anxiety medication is prescribed by your medical doctor. Finally, education is the key to a healthy life, so talk to a highly trained mental health provider to address your concerns about the treatment of anxiety. Take the necessary step today to improve your quality of life.