

## WHAT IS ANXIETY

Six major types of anxiety disorders have been identified, each with its own symptoms.

**Panic disorder** is an acute type of anxiety, sometimes referred to as a panic or anxiety attack. It is caused when the body's natural "fight or flight" reaction occurs at the wrong time. A panic disorder may also be accompanied by agoraphobia, which is the fear of being in places where escape or help would be difficult.

**Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)** is one chronic form of anxiety characterized by constant worry and fear that distracts from day-to-day activities, or troubling persistent feelings that something bad is going to happen. People with GAD are chronic worriers who feel anxious nearly all of the time, though they may not even know why. Anxiety related to GAD often shows up as physical symptoms like insomnia, stomach upset, restlessness, and fatigue.

**Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** is another type of chronic anxiety characterized by unwanted thoughts or behaviors that seem impossible to stop or control. People with OCD may be troubled by obsessions like recurring worries that they forgot to turn off the oven or that they might hurt someone. They may also suffer from uncontrollable compulsions, such as washing their hands over and over.

**Phobias** are unrealistic or exaggerated fears of a specific object, activity, or situation that in reality presents little to no danger. Common phobias include fear of animals like snakes and spiders, fear of flying, and fear of heights. In the case of a severe phobia, one might go to extreme lengths to avoid the thing one fears. Avoidance only serves to strengthen phobias.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is an extreme chronic anxiety disorder that can occur in the aftermath of a traumatic or life-threatening event. It can be thought of as a panic attack that rarely, if ever, lets up. Symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks or nightmares about what happened, hyper vigilance, startling easily, withdrawing from others, and avoiding situations that reminds one of the trauma.

**Social anxiety disorder** is a chronic debilitating fear of being seen negatively by others and humiliated in public, also known as social phobia. This disorder can be thought of as extreme shyness. In severe cases, social situations are avoided altogether. Performance anxiety (known as stage fright) is the most common type of social phobia.

Susun Weed distinguishes fear from anxiety. She notes that, while fear promotes health and protection, anxiety destroys health and increases vulnerability. It shortens breath, narrows blood vessels, and interferes with the functioning of the immune system. Fear is useful energy, calling on our courage, while anxiety promotes feelings of insecurity, helplessness and weakness. (Menopause)