

Ryan was about to leave for class. He walked to his desk and did what he does every morning. He placed his wallet, keys, cell phone, and pen in his pockets in that exact order. He then tapped the desk four times because four was his lucky number. As he walked out the door he saw himself lock it, yet he had to check it four times to be safe. These behaviors impaired him throughout the day and he knew they were irrational. However, he believed they kept him from having a bad day, so he continued to do them.

## -----Anxiety Disorders-----

### What Are Anxiety Disorders?

Ryan suffers from an anxiety disorder known as obsessive compulsive disorder. Anxiety is not an uncommon thing; it is normal, and in fact, adaptive in certain situations. However, if you experience anxiety on a regular basis in many everyday situations, you may suffer from an anxiety disorder.

### There are several different types of anxiety disorders

#### Panic Disorder

This disorder is characterized by recurring and unexpected panic attacks, which are instances of extreme fear or discomfort that start abruptly and build to a rapid peak, usually within the span of ten minutes. Panic disorder is more often found in women, and usually appears between late adolescence and the mid-thirties.

#### Physical symptoms:

- heart palpitations
- sweating
- trembling
- shortness of breath and/or a choking sensation
- chest pain
- nausea and/or dizziness/disorientation
- fear of losing control or dying
- chills or hot flushes
- numbness
- a sense of looming danger and a strong desire to escape

#### Psychological Symptoms:

- steady worry about having more attacks
- concern as to why you are having panic attacks and what they mean
- making significant behavioral changes due to the panic attacks

If you've experienced the physical symptoms of panic attacks, followed by the psychological symptoms persisting for over a month, there is a good chance you may have panic disorder.

**\*\*Attacks can be brought on by specific triggers or may occur for no obvious reason\*\***

## Phobias

Phobias are exaggerated, involuntary, and irrational fears of particular situations/things.

### Types:

- **Specific (simple) phobia:** a phobia that is triggered by a specific object or situation; these usually appear in childhood and are more common in women
- **Social phobia (social anxiety disorder):** a phobia characterized by extreme fear of social situations for fear of meeting new people and/or being embarrassed, humiliated, or judged by others; this usually appears in the mid-teens
- **Agoraphobia:** an intense fear of being trapped in particular places or situations, and of not being able to find help in the event of an anxiety or a panic attack; usually those with agoraphobia will avoid such situations

**\*\*In the case of a specific or social phobia, people experience anxiety when exposed to a specific object or situation to the point where it is disruptive to their lifestyle, even though they recognize that the fear is irrational \*\***

## Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive compulsive is a disorder in which one is constantly plagued with certain unwelcome thoughts or images (obsessions), and feels the need to then perform rituals (compulsions) to prevent or get rid of these obsessions; performing these rituals is not pleasurable, but does result in a feeling of temporary relief from the anxiety that is caused by not performing them.

**Common obsessions:** fear of germs, fixation on lucky/unlucky numbers, fear of danger, need for order/exactness, or excessive doubt

**Common compulsions:** ritualistic handwashing, counting, hoarding, arranging, or checking

**\*\*These obsessions and compulsions are experienced for more than an hour each day in a way that interferes with life or causes anxiety\*\***

**\*\*Symptoms may come and go, may ease over time, or may get worse over time—each case is different\*\***

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Definition:** a disorder that consists of persistent frightening thoughts/memories, or re-living of a terrifying event that resulted in feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

**Other Symptoms:** feelings of emotional numbness, sleep problems, avoidance of places or situations that remind one of the event, and increased arousal; the symptoms usually appear within three months of the traumatic event, but may surface several months or even years later.

**\*\*Symptoms will last for longer than one month and severely impede proper functioning\*\***

## Generalized Anxiety Disorder

General anxiety disorder causes excessive anxiety and worry about several everyday events or activities, to the point where this worry interferes with daily work and social settings; the worry cannot be overcome despite the fact that the person realizes that their worry is exaggerated.

**Physical Symptoms:** fatigue, headaches, edginess, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, trembling/twitching, sweating, hot flashes, and sleep disturbances.

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## What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety disorders have been seen to run in families, and may be the result of one's brain chemistry. The likelihood of having an anxiety disorder is also related to certain life experiences.

## How Can Anxiety Disorders be Treated?

Aerobic exercise helps to reduce anxiety and helps with concentration. Friends, relationships and clubs or groups can help, and so does developing studying strategies that help you see you can do the work. When thinking about anxiety you may want to assess your coffee/caffeine intake—it helps with wakefulness but can make anxiety a lot worse. If these strategies are not useful, there is good evidence for clinical strategies such as therapy and, for some, medications.

Medication and therapy are the typical types of treatment.

- The most common medications are antidepressants and benzodiazepines. In addition, there are several other drugs in the market and new ones being developed. If treatment with one medication doesn't work, there are other options.
- The most common types of talk therapy are:
  - **behavioral therapy**: involving relaxation techniques and gradual exposure to the thing or situation causing the anxiety in an attempt to reduce the anxiety
  - **cognitive-behavioral therapy**: involving changing thinking patterns or helping individuals react differently to what causes their anxiety

**Warning:** Regular or heavy alcohol use can worsen most psychological states, such as anxiety, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, or eating problems. Alcohol can change the way a person feels in the short run; however, the overall effect only worsens a disorder. Marijuana and other drugs can have similar or more serious effects on the brain.

**To receive more detailed information on some of these disorders, please call the NAMI toll-free helpline: (800) 950 NAMI (6264) or visit [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) for more information.**

**The National Institute of Mental Health-[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)**

**The Anxiety Disorders Association of America [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)**

**American College Counseling Association [www.collegecounseling.org](http://www.collegecounseling.org)**

**Screening for Mental Health [www.mentalhealthscreening.org](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org)**

**National Panhellenic Conference [www.npcwomen.org](http://www.npcwomen.org)**

**National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide (NOPCAS) [www.nopcas.org](http://www.nopcas.org)**

**National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association [www.naapimha.org](http://www.naapimha.org)**

**The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org);**

**English 1-800-273-TALK; Spanish 1-800-628-9454**

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