

What is Anxiety?

“My panic attacks were triggered by the separation anxiety from the loss of my dad.”

Annie Olivares was 9 years old when her dad died of a sudden heart attack. That trauma created anxiety in her that she couldn't control.

“So, when my mom would drop me off at school, I wasn't able to leave her side because I was so worried something was going to happen to her.”

An anxiety disorder like Annie's is more than the normal nerves or anxiousness we experience over, say, a big project at work or slippery driving conditions. Anxiety becomes a disorder if it doesn't go away or interferes with daily life. Anxiety disorders are very common. In fact, nearly 40-million adults in the U.S. have some type of anxiety disorder.

“One in four people at some point in their lifetime will be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. So, there are millions and millions of people in this country suffering from anxiety-based conditions.”

There are many individual types of anxiety disorders, all with their own symptoms. The most common include panic disorder, phobias, social anxiety and generalized anxiety disorder.

“I think it gets debilitating when it creates doubt in my own abilities.”

Sarah Reed is a successful psychologist with an impressive resumé and a lot of personal achievements. Yet, she suffers from anxious thoughts that make her doubt herself.

“Kind of this sense that I am not as smart as people think me to be. I'm not as able as people think me to be. Someday the other shoe is going to drop and they're going to find out I'm a fraud of some kind.”

“We're talking, on average, individuals who are unfortunately worrying, you know, many, many hours of the day to the point where they're not able to accomplish a lot of their basic tasks that are otherwise important to them.”

Phobias, another form of anxiety disorder, involve an intense, irrational fear. The object of the phobia is not really as dangerous as the person thinks. Common phobias include the fear of specific objects, like spiders, or situations, such as a fear of heights or riding in elevators. The fear is out of proportion to the actual risk involved.

José Carmona suffers from agoraphobia, where he feels trapped and panicky in crowds, riding a bus, or being in open or enclosed spaces.

“A lot of days it's just like I don't want to get up at all. But there's days where I push myself to do so.”

José carries a “stress bag” with him to help with anxiety including a fidget spinner.

“Because when you keep spinning it, it's kind of like you're hypnotized by it and you're not really thinking about anxiety. Before I've done this for like 30 minutes and by the time I was done, I felt a lot better.”

What is Anxiety?

If you feel anxious much of the time, and your fears are getting in the way of living your life, talk to a mental health professional or your doctor.

“My feeling would be if someone is wondering whether they should go get help, it probably means that it wouldn't be a bad idea.”

While every anxiety disorder is different, a healthcare or mental health professional can help you understand how treatment can help reduce your symptoms. These symptoms might include: Intense fear or dread; Feeling tense or jumpy; Restlessness; Irritability or Anticipating the worst result that can happen. Physical symptoms of anxiety might include: A racing heart or shortness of breath; Sweating, tremors and twitches; Headaches, fatigue or trouble sleeping; And an upset stomach, frequent urination or diarrhea.

The good news is there are treatments for anxiety including medications and Psychotherapy or Talk Therapy.

“There are very specific therapies. There are very specific medications that have been found to be effective in treating these different conditions. It's not like back in the old days where no matter what your problem was you got the same medicine and the same type therapy. It is very individualized. And research shows very effective.”

With the right treatment, you can manage your anxiety disorder, and not let it manage you.