

Facts about addiction and anxiety disorders

People with alcohol and other drug dependencies often suffer from co-occurring mental health illnesses.

Mental health and recovery

Individuals with untreated mental health issues may experience more difficulty in recovery.

For some people alcohol and drug use and withdrawal can cause symptoms of anxiety. In these cases the anxiety symptoms may be substance induced and the symptoms will subside with prolonged abstinence. For others the symptoms of anxiety persist and may even worsen with prolonged abstinence thus making recovery more difficult. For these individuals, treatment options are available.

What is an anxiety disorder?

Most people experience feelings of anxiety before an important event such as a business presentation, an exam, or perhaps even a first date. Anxiety disorders, however, are illnesses that fill people's lives with overwhelming worry and fear. They are chronic and can grow progressively worse if untreated.

How common are anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental illnesses in America today. An estimated 13% of adults ages 18 to 54 in a given year (more than 19 million people) are affected by anxiety disorders.^{1, 2}

Types of anxiety disorders

Panic Disorders

Individuals with panic disorders have repeated experiences of intense fear that strike often and without warning. They cannot predict when an attack will occur and they may develop intense anxiety between episodes, worrying when and where the next one will happen. Symptoms of a panic attack

may include heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pain, a tingling sensation in the hands, and feeling flushed or chilled.

A panic attack may also be accompanied by a sense of unrealistic fear of impending doom or loss of control. They can occur at any time, even during sleep. Panic attacks generally last about ten minutes, but some symptoms may last longer.³

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Recurrent, unwanted thoughts (called obsessions) and/or repetitive behaviors (called compulsions) that seem impossible to stop or control are characteristics of OCD. Examples of a compulsion may include repetitive hand washing, counting things, cleaning, or checking (Did I turn off the stove?).

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

This illness involves persistent symptoms that occur after experiencing a traumatic event such as a rape, other criminal assaults, war, child abuse, natural disasters, or accidents. Nightmares, flashbacks, numbing of the emotions, depression, being easily startled, feeling angry, irritable, or distracted are common with this disorder.³

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Constant worrisome thoughts about every day life events and activities are common with GAD. Those with GAD usually anticipate the worst even though there is little reason to expect it. It can be accompanied by physical symptoms such as fatigue, trembling, muscle tension, headache, or nausea.³

What are effective treatments for anxiety disorders?

Treatments for all types of anxiety disorders include behavioral therapy (which focuses on changing specific actions and uses several techniques to stop the unwanted behaviors) as well as cognitive behavioral therapy (which teaches individuals to understand and change their thinking patterns so they can react differently to situations that cause them anxiety). Medications can also be helpful. It is important to discuss medication options with a professional who has knowledge about substance abuse and dependency because some medications used to treat anxiety can be addictive.

Do anxiety disorders coexist with other illnesses?

It is common for an anxiety disorder to co-occur with substance abuse, depression, eating disorders, or another type of anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders can also accompany physical illness. When other illnesses coexist with anxiety disorder, they too must be appropriately diagnosed and treated.

About Mental Health Services

Mental health services at Hazelden are part of the internationally recognized Hazelden Foundation. Hazelden, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. Built on decades of knowledge and experience, Hazelden's comprehensive approach to addiction addresses the full range of patient, family, and professional needs, including treatment and continuing care for youth and adults, research, higher learning, public education and advocacy, and publishing.

For more information about mental health services at Hazelden, please call 800-257-7800.

References

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