



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Anxiety Disorders**

Anxiety disorders are more than just wounded nerves. They are treatable medical illnesses that bring on feelings of overwhelming fear strong enough to interfere with daily functioning. Over 19 million people are currently suffering from anxiety disorders. In fact, the National Institute of Mental Health has recently named anxiety disorders the most common mental illness in America. Anxiety disorders include: panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, social phobia, obsessive compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. People who suffer from an anxiety disorder are often distressed by irrational

thoughts, fears, compulsive behaviors and rituals, flashbacks, nightmares, and psychosomatic symptoms. Anxiety disorders affect the mind, body, and behaviors, and the symptoms of anxiety are known to be chronic, binding, and can grow progressively worse if left untreated. In most cases, people who suffer from anxiety disorders often have difficulty handling their work, family, and social responsibilities.

The National Institute of Mental Health has classified the following five types of anxiety disorders:

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** excessive anxiety and worry that last for at least six months accompanied by other physical and behavioral problems.
- **Social Phobia:** a persistent fear of one or more situations in which the person is exposed to possible scrutiny of others.
- **Panic Disorder:** a sudden, uncontrollable attack often terror that can manifest itself with heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, and an out of control or terribly frightening feeling.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:** repeated, intrusive and unwanted thoughts that cause anxiety, often accompanied by ritualized behavior that relieve this anxiety.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:** caused when some one experiences a severely distressing or traumatic event. Recurring nightmares and/or flashbacks and unprovoked anger are common symptoms.

Symptoms of Anxiety

- Worry or fear that something bad might happen.
- Trembling, twitching, or feeling shaky.
- Fatigue or restlessness
- Muscle tension or jitteriness.
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Fast heartbeat or breathing rate
- Sweating or cold or clammy hands
- Dry mouth, nausea, or diarrhea
- Irritability, impatience, easily distracted.
- Difficulty swallowing
- Memory problems
- Hot or cold flashes



How are Anxiety Disorders Treated?

There are many ways anxiety disorders can be treated, but the most effective forms of treatment are cognitive-behavioral therapy and medication. Cognitive-Behavioral therapy teaches several techniques to stop unwanted thoughts and behaviors, among these are diaphragmatic breathing exercises, and cognitive restructuring to change thinking patterns. Behavior or exposure therapy encourages patients to gradually enter a feared situation or setting with the intent to overcome their fears. Medication is only prescribed when symptoms of anxiety interfere with daily functioning and the therapy process. In some cases, a combination of therapies, such as group therapy, hypnotherapy, and self-help support groups may be encouraged. If a person experiences of anxiety for a time period longer than six weeks, a mental health professional should be consulted.

A person's genetics, biochemistry, environment, and psychological profile all seem to contribute to the development of an anxiety disorder. Before treatment begins, a thorough medical examination is often performed to determine the cause of the anxiety, but it is not unusual for these disorders to be misdiagnosed. The National Institute of Mental Health indicates that most anxiety disorders are accompanied by other health problems, such as depression, eating disorders, substance abuse or other mental illnesses. If the anxiety is caused by medications or substance abuse, it is not considered an anxiety disorder.



How Can Family Members Show Their Support?

Mental health professionals suggest that family members take an active role in the anxiety disorder treatment process. Close family members can become part of the treatment team by offering their support and encouragement, creating an environment for healing, and with the right training, accompanying the patient into anxiety-producing situations. The Anxiety Disorders Association of America believes that close family members and friends improve the treatment process by supporting their loved ones in the following ways:

- recognizing and praising small accomplishments
- modifying expectations during stressful periods
- being flexible and trying to maintain a normal routine
- measuring progress on the basis of individual improvement, not on an absolute standard

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

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| Website | www.portagepath.org |
| Appointments | 330-253-3100 800-828-4508 |

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

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| Support Hotline | 330-434-9144 |
| North Summit | 888-434-8878 |
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