Understanding Anxiety

What are Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety is the most common mental health condition in Australia. Up to one-third of women and one-fifth of men will experience anxiety at some point in their lifetime.

Feelings of anxiety is our bodies natural reaction to alert us to danger or perceived threats in our environment. This is known as the fight-flight-response. If worry is persistent and affects daily life or activites, you may be experiencing an anxiety disorder. Anxiety may evoke intense feelings of worry or distress that are difficult to control or manage. Anxiety can interfere with our everyday activities and responsibilities and make coping with 'normal' challenges more difficult.

What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety disorders are thought to be caused by a combination of factors. These are explained below.

Biological Factors

Some people who experience anxiety disorders may have a genetic vulnerability towards developing anxiety. This means that the likelihood of you developing an anxiety condition may be higher because it is in your blood line. However, it is important to know that if a close relative experiences anxiety or other mental health condition, this *does not* mean you will also develop one.

Personality Factors

People with certain personality traits are found to have a greater likelihood of developing an anxiety disorder. People who express perfectionistic traits, feel easily flustered, timid, inhibited, lack self-esteem or want to control everything as a child may develop anxiety during childhood, adolescence or in adulthood.

Situational factors

Ongoing stressful events may result in the development of an anxiety condition. Such stressful events may include:

- Occupational stress or change
- A change in living arrangements
- Family or relationship problems
- Pregnancy or giving birth
- Death or loss of a loved one
- Verbal, sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- Emotional shock following a traumatic event

Physical Health Impacts

Chronic physical illness may contribute to an anxiety disorder or impact on treatment for anxiety. Diabetes, asthma, hypertension, and heart disease are common chronic conditions associated with anxiety disorders. Some physical conditions can also mimic anxiety such as an overactive thyroid.

Impacts of other Mental Health Conditions and Substance Use

Some people may experience multiple anxiety disorders, or other mental health conditions. Depression and anxiety often co-occur. Some people who experience mental health conditions may use alcohol or other drugs to help them manage. In some cases, this can lead to developing a substance use disorder. Substance use can also aggravate anxiety, particularly when effects of the substance are wearing of.

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Types of Anxiety Disorders

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

An overwhelming and persistent worry about several or many things that make it hard to function in your everyday life.

Common Symptoms	
Restlessness	Concentration problems
Feeling tired easily	Irritability
Sleeping problems	Tense muscles

Social Anxiety/Phobia

Extremely fearfulness and anxiety about situations where we are exposed to unfamiliar people or think we're being judged by others.

Common Symptoms
Intense fear of being judged by others
Fearful of rejection or offending people
Worried of showing signs of anxiety and feeling embarrassed

Triggering situations may include:

- Meeting new people
- Being the focus of attention
- Being criticised
- Being watched doing something
- Speaking or performing in public
- Being made to feel embarrassed.

Panic Disorder

Intense fear or discomfort that arises quite suddenly. Symptoms of panic attacks generally subside after a few minutes, and are not as long lasting as anxiety symptom which can prevail for longer periods.

Common Symptoms	
Heart palpitations	Difficulty breathing
Trembling/shaking	Fear of dying
Sweating	Nausea
Chest pain	Dizziness

Accessing Support

The information provided within this fact sheet is not a diagnostic tool, but for educational purposes. If you feel like you are experiencing some of the symptoms described or are concerned for your wellbeing, please see your GP or health professional.

Reach Out Peer Supporters

Local and trusted volunteering DELWP staff trained in Psychological First Aid, offering support and guidance for DELWP staff for personal or work-related matters.

1800 512 343

reachout@delwp.vic.gov.au

Employee Assistant Program

Short term solution focused counselling and support for all staff and immediate family members, delivered by Converge International.

1300 687 327
https://www.convergeinternational.com.au/

Lifeline

24-hour general counselling, crisis support and suicide prevention service.

13 11 14
https://www.lifeline.org.au/

References

Black Dog Institute. (2020). *Anxiety*. Retrieved from https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/anxiety/

Beyond Blue. (2020). *What causes anxiety?* Retrieved from https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety/what-causes-anxiety