

Condition:



Social Anxiety Disorder

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What is Social Anxiety Disorder?

Social Anxiety Disorder is a constant fear of one or more social or performance situations, in which you are distressed by social contact with unfamiliar people and/or to possible close attention by others. You fear you will act in a way (or show anxiety symptoms) that will be embarrassing and humiliating in front of others.

The feared situation will cause physical reactions (see 'How do I know' below). You will recognise that this fear is unreasonable or excessive.

Social Anxiety Disorder and Work

Social anxiety operates at both a day-to-day level in the workplace (having to deliver speeches, meeting new co-workers, dealing with confrontation, meeting deadlines, talking in meetings or using the phone) but it can also influence careers by limiting the ability to network and attend business social events, or by increasing the fear of promotion and extra responsibility.

Managing social anxiety disorder at work involves recognizing the day-to-day impact of the disorder on your career and coming up with solutions to implement to reduce them. Receiving a diagnosis and entering treatment is the first step toward managing your anxiety symptoms.

- **Speaking on the phone:**

Because of the lack of body language and the potential for the unexpected, making a phone call can easily trigger social anxiety. Good tools to help combat this in the workplace is to make careful notes about what you want to talk about; prepare for the potential for having to leave a phone message or arrange a more appropriate time to call; and practice making phone calls at home, starting with simple calls to businesses to ask straightforward questions and moving on to more complex issues.

- **Speaking in meetings:**

Simply raising points in team meeting can be tough for those with social anxiety. Be well prepared, don't rely on your memory, but prepare cards or notes if you're having to give a presentation or take notes during the meeting to help gather your thoughts if you want to bring up a point during a discussion. Rehearse if you're giving a speech. Get familiar with the location of the meeting in advance. If you use any presentation aids, such as power-point, make sure that you know how to operate them.

- **Meeting deadlines:**

A key tool to have is preparation. Avoidance itself can lead to anxiety, so being organised and prepared will help you remain calm as the pressure of the deadline ramps up. Working with others can also help ease the burden of a stressful workplace and, although it can be hard asking for help from co-workers, confronting that initial anxiety of discussing a problem with a colleague can save a greater deal of anxiety as deadline approaches.

- **Be realistic:**

Don't over commit or offer to take on projects if you don't realistically have enough time. Also think about where your skills lie and used these in projects instead of offering to present or train which might be more challenging for you.

- **Communicate:**

Let your employer know about your social anxiety as they may be able to make reasonable adjustments on your behalf. Speak up calmly and diplomatically if you are asked to be put into a situation that is too much to handle.

How do I know? What does Social Anxiety Disorder feel Like?

You will find yourself avoiding, anxiously anticipating, or feeling distress when talking to people. This includes both meeting new people, and attending social gatherings.

You may experience symptoms such as:

Blushing
Inability to make eye contact
Shaking and trembling
Stomach churning or a feeling of 'butterflies in the stomach'
Sweating
Cold clammy hands
Dizziness and light headedness
Needing to go to the toilet

What Social Anxiety Disorder?

The causes of Social Anxiety Disorder can be biological or social.

Biological: tends to run in families and can be inherited from one or both parents.

Social: causes include childhood experiences of bullying and rejection or ridicule. Abuse, or childhood experience with a parent who is socially anxious, are also linked.

Talking to your GP/ Health Professional

Social Anxiety is recognised when the avoidance, nervousness, or distress in the social or performance situation(s) interferes significantly with your normal routine, occupational functioning, or social activities and relationships.

It is usually diagnosed by a mental health professional such as a psychologist or psychotherapist after referral either directly or via your GP.

Typical thoughts and feelings you may have are:

- A strong sense of fear in social situations that won't go away.
- Thinking you will act in a way that is be embarrassing in front of others.
- A belief that others are judging and thinking badly of you.
- A belief that people won't like you if you get it wrong or people will think that you are stupid.
- Having a negative picture in your mind about how you see yourself which you believe that other people will pick up on.
- After a social situation has finished, believing that it was an awful experience and that you have been judged negatively.

Social Anxiety differs from nerves or shyness. The fear, anxiety or avoidance is persistent, typically lasting 6 months or more. These feelings may be accompanied by a marked distress about having the fear.

One or more of the physical symptoms listed above will occur alongside negative thoughts and feelings.

Treatments

Different types of therapy interventions can be applied by qualified mental health professionals.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

This is a type of therapeutic intervention that focuses on changing your thoughts in order to change your emotional state and behaviour.

Group Therapy / Education.

You will be invited to participate in a therapy group with others experiencing Social Anxiety Disorder.

Exposure therapy

This is where you are initially exposed to an anxiety causing situation in a controlled manner, which is gradually increased.

The GP may prescribe anti-depressants in some situations, as these have shown to have an effect in reducing symptoms of anxiety when existing alongside low mood.

Self-Management

Self-management strategies are focused on managing your wellbeing.



Be active

Manage physical health by being active regularly - This will help to support the effectiveness of anxiety treatment and will help support you through anxiety provoking situations such as a job interview.



Keep learning

Learn more about breathing techniques and mindfulness meditation may also help to manage the symptoms and feelings of distress when faced with a stressful situation. For more information about simple and effective breathing techniques, see the link below.

Learn as much as you can about exactly how your social anxiety is affecting your day to day life. Keeping a journal to record your thoughts and feelings, and reactions to difficult situations, might help to detach from the anxieties.

Detaching from the anxieties will help you to look at them as something that can be altered, reflected on and re-evaluated, rather than something that is a part of you that cannot be changed.



Connect

When you find yourself in the midst of a stressful situation, pay attention to what is happening around you. Rather than monitoring yourself you could try:

- Looking at other people and noticing details about them
- Listening to what is being said



Taking Notice

Really thinking about what is going on around you can help you to distract from your anxiety. Mindfulness can help to reduce your symptoms such as panic and withdrawal.



Eating a balanced diet

Eating a healthy balance diet can help you to keep a healthy weight, give you the energy and vitamins your body needs as well as helping you to feel your best. Cutting out sugary drinks and snacks and trying to maintain your “5 a day” is a great place to start.



Sleep

Make sure you get sufficient amounts of quality sleep. Some tips include, removing any phones, or screens from your bedroom (the blue light is really bad for sleep), don't fall asleep with the television on and your room is clean and well aired.

These are simple actions that can easily be incorporated into your day that will greatly enhance your overall sense of personal wellbeing.

Useful links

