

“I don’t know much about anxiety. What are the different types and how are they treated?”

Anxiety is something that almost everyone experiences at some point.

Mental health is often overlooked when discussing our overall health. Some people walk around in great physical shape, but are secretly dealing with mental health issues. We must remember that the human brain is an organ, and just like the heart, the lungs or the kidneys, it can have health issues of its own. While there are many mental illnesses, anxiety disorders are the most common.

Anxiety

If you have ever had to prepare for a presentation, a loved one became sick or you have lost your job, you most likely know what it is like to be anxious. Being anxious involves feelings of being unprepared, worried or uncertain. Anxiety is actually part of our body’s fight-or-flight response, which evolved in us so we could act quickly in the face of danger or problems.

Anxiety disorders

Most of the time, anxiety will go away once the cause of the anxiety is gone. However, when someone suffers from an anxiety disorder, those emotions become chronic and can spiral into a sensation of helplessness and constant worry.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, including:

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder** – chronic anxiety, even when there is nothing to cause it. People with this disorder worry about small things that have very little or no impact on their lives.
- **Panic Disorder** – reoccurring panic attacks, which are periods of *extreme* anxiety. They can be debilitating and usually have physical symptoms such as sweating and heart palpitations.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder** – also called social phobia, it is characterized by overwhelming anxiety in social situations.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** – reoccurring, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and/or repetitive behaviors (compulsions).
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** – can develop after going through a terrifying event or ordeal in which serious physical harm occurred or was threatened.

Some people can be diagnosed with more than one anxiety disorder.

What are the symptoms?

People who suffer from an anxiety disorder can experience some or all of these symptoms most days, and symptoms are often difficult to control:

- Restless, nervous or tense
- Headaches or muscle aches
- Sleeping problems
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Unable to control worries
- Depression

Who can it affect?

Anyone can have an anxiety disorder, but there are risk factors that can increase the chance of developing one:

- Substance abuse
- Family history of anxiety disorders
- Chronic stress
- Physical and/or mental trauma – especially from childhood
- Serious medical issues

Dealing with anxiety and treatment

If you are anxious because of a life event, and you think it will be temporary, you may want to try some simple techniques to help you control the anxiety:

- Get some exercise.
- Talk with a friend or family member.
- Listen to music.
- Go for a long walk.
- Take deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly.
- Keep a consistent sleeping schedule, about seven to eight hours a night.
- Eat plenty of healthy foods: vegetables, fruits and lean meats are a great start!

If you believe that your anxiety is more than just temporary, speak with your doctor. He or she will be able to point you in the right direction to get the proper treatment.

If you would like information on providers or services for a behavioral health (mental health or substance use) problem, please call Fallon's behavioral health partner, Beacon Health Options at 1-888-421-8861 (TTY: 1-781-994-7660).

If your employer has one, you could also reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for support and advice.

For more information about anxiety and anxiety disorders, visit fallonhealth.org, click on Healthwise® Knowledgebase under Quick links, and search "anxiety".

