

ON MY LAST NERVE

If you have ever experienced anxiety, you're familiar with the fear, dread, and uneasiness that it brings. Anxiety can be a normal reaction to problems related to relationships, work, financial or health issues. To some degree, anxiety can be helpful. Before taking a test or giving a presentation at work, for example, anxiety can motivate you to prepare and perform at your best.

But for many people, stress, worry and loss associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has taken their anxiety to a whole new level. If the last year has left you feeling just a little anxious, you are not alone. You may find yourself feeling as if you are "on my last nerve."

If this describes you, it's important to know that help is available. Make an appointment with your healthcare provider if anxiety is affecting your everyday life to learn what solutions might be right for you. Like other mental health conditions, anxiety can be harder to treat the longer you wait.

When Is Anxiety Considered a Disorder?

When anxiety sticks around and becomes your brain's go-to response to stressors big or small and interferes with your job or your home life, it's considered a disorder. Those with anxiety disorders have frequent, intense, persistent, excessive worry and fear about common situations that can result in episodes that are referred to as "panic attacks."

These feelings interfere with their lives, are hard to control, are out of proportion to the actual danger and can last a long time. People with anxiety often avoid places or situations to prevent these feelings. Symptoms can start during childhood or during teens and continue into adulthood.

Signs & Symptoms

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of approaching danger or panic
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble focusing on anything other than their current worry
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Avoiding things that trigger anxiety



How Common is Anxiety?

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 18% of all adults. Although anxiety disorders are highly treatable, less than 40% of those suffering receive treatment.

Causes

The causes of anxiety disorders aren't fully understood. Traumatic events can trigger anxiety disorders in people who may already be prone to anxiety. Inherited traits also can play a role.

In some cases, anxiety can be associated with an underlying health issue. In fact, anxiety signs and symptoms can be the first indicators of a medical illness. If your healthcare provider suspects your anxiety may be due to a medical condition, they may perform tests to look for signs of a problem.

Health problems that can be linked to anxiety include:

- Drug or alcohol misuse or withdrawal
- Chronic pain or irritable bowel syndrome
- Rare tumors that produce certain fight-or-flight hormones
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Thyroid problems, such as hyperthyroidism
- Respiratory disorders like asthma
- Withdrawal from medications

Complications

Having an anxiety disorder can lead to, or worsen, other physical or mental conditions, such as:

- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Sleep issues
- Digestive problems
- Headaches and chronic pain
- Social isolation
- Problems functioning at school or work
- Poor quality of life
- Suicide



HEADACHES



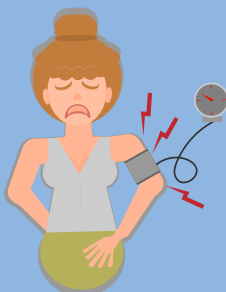
SLEEP LOSS



UPSET STOMACH



CHEST PAINS



INCREASED BLOOD PRESSURE

Prevention & Treatment

Anxiety may not go away on its own. In fact, for some people it gets worse over time for those who don't seek help. That's why it's important to visit your healthcare provider before your anxiety gets worse. Anxiety is easier to treat for those that get help early.

There's no way to predict what will cause a person to develop an anxiety disorder. However, you can take steps to reduce the impact of symptoms by:

- Getting help early. Anxiety can be more difficult to treat for those who wait.
- Avoiding alcohol or drug use. Alcohol and drug use can cause or increase anxiety. For those who are addicted and try to quit, it can make them anxious. Find a healthcare provider or support group to help you.
- Staying active. Participate in activities that you enjoy and that make you feel positive. Having social interaction and caring relationships can help alleviate anxiety.



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

If you or a loved one are having suicidal thoughts, call the confidential toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.