



Anxiety

Anxiety is best described as a feeling of dread and apprehension about unclear or future threats. All human beings experience anxiety at some point in their life. We speak about anxiety disorders when anxiety is so extreme that it impairs the occupational, social and family functioning of the person.

Anxiety disorder syndromes

Anxiety can be experienced in several different ways:

1. **Phobias.** A strong and continuing fear of a situation or object which the sufferer recognises as posing no real threat which however leads to the avoidance of the stimulus. People with phobia plan their life around avoiding the stimulus that causes anxiety. There are two types of phobias: specific phobia which is fear of a particular object or situation e.g. claustrophobia and affects 11% of the general population and social phobia which is severe nervousness, embarrassment and fear when interacting with other people e.g. public speaking and 13.3 % of the general population suffers from it.
2. **Generalized anxiety disorder.** A chronic state of excessive and uncontrollable anxiety. It affects 5% of the general population.
3. **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).** Individuals suffer from recurring, distressing and inappropriate thoughts known as obsessions e.g. hurting someone and feel forced to repeat an action constantly known as compulsions e.g. washing hands. 2-3% of the general population suffers from OCD.
4. **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).** Follows a traumatic event and is a severe reaction which lasts at least one month and involves strong feelings of fear and helplessness. It is most common in soldiers returning from combat as well as civilians/workers involved in natural disasters or attacks. A small fraction of individuals who experience traumatic events go on to develop PTSD yet as many as 65% of those who suffered sexual abuse develop PTSD.
5. **Panic Disorder.** Individuals suffer from panic attacks which are unexpected and the person feels dizzy, has difficulty breathing, experiences nausea and chest pains amongst other symptoms. The world may start to seem unreal or the person may feel that he/she is not real. This may lead to agoraphobia where sufferers refuse to leave the house out of fear of having a panic attack. 3.5% of the population is likely to suffer from this disorder.

Famous people with anxiety disorders

- Aretha Franklin (singer)
- Johnny Depp (actor)
- Barbara Streisand (singer)
- Abraham Lincoln (president of USA)

Treatment: A combination of psychosocial interventions and medication are used to help individuals gain control of their conditions.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT): modifies problematic thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

Medication: minor tranquilizers and anti-depressants are often prescribed.

Professional help: It is important to seek help from qualified psychiatrists who can prescribe medication and qualified therapists who are specifically trained to use techniques that help the sufferer deal with his/her symptoms and feelings.