

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SERIES

Anxiety

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Anxiety is a mental health condition that people may misunderstand because its symptoms can overlap with stress and other mental health conditions. Many of us may find ourselves worrying throughout the week and wondering if we have




anxiety. However, the symptoms of anxiety are more complex than normal daily hassles and worries. When people experience symptoms of an anxiety disorder, they describe worries that do not go away.

How common is anxiety?

Worldwide, one out of every 14 people experiences an anxiety disorder. According to a mental health survey of U.S. adults, nearly one-third of adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression. A smaller percentage of people reported increased worries and nervousness but not additional symptoms of depression or anxiety. In a 2022 survey of Kentucky adults, nearly a third of adults reported experiencing symptoms of an anxiety or depressive disorder which is higher than the rest of the nation. Overall, more Kentuckians have reported anxiety disorder symptoms since the beginning of 2022. Consequently, there has been a rise in anxiety and depressive symptoms among Kentucky's children since 2017. In fact, anxiety symptoms among children in Kentucky exceed the national average of children who face anxiety symptoms. The presence of anxiety among children and adults has several different symptom features and is attributable to many different risk factors.

Anxiety symptoms and risks

Several types of anxiety conditions exist. These conditions include generalized anxiety, phobias, post-traumatic stress, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and panic disorders. Many symptoms of anxiety disorders overlap with each other and can include worrisome thoughts about events, people, places, or things. Generally, anxiety symptoms occur most days of the week for a period of at least six months.



Children can have the same symptoms of anxiety that happen in adults.

Adult symptoms

- Too much anxiety or worry marked by apprehensive expectation; fear, worry, or anxiety can include avoiding certain objects, situations, or social interactions
- Trouble controlling worry
- Feeling restless, keyed up, or panicked
- Tiring easily
- Problems concentrating or mind going blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance including problems going to sleep or staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfied sleep
- Obsessive thoughts or compulsive behaviors
- Avoiding certain events, activities, situations, people, or places

Symptoms in children

Children can have the same symptoms of anxiety that happen in adults but can experience very different types of fears and worries. Symptoms of anxiety in children include:

- Feeling extremely afraid when apart from their parents (separation anxiety)

- Extreme fear about specific things or circumstances like fear of animals or needles (phobias)
- Afraid of school and places with people (social anxiety)
- Especially worried about bad things happening or the future (general anxiety)
- Recurrent events of sudden, intense, and unintentional fear that include a pounding heart, problems breathing, or feeling dizzy or shaky (panic attack)

Risk factors

The risk and protective factors that predispose people to develop anxiety can vary by age, family history, health history, and socioeconomic circumstances. In children, anxiety disorders may develop as young as 3 years old. Common predisposing factors for anxiety in children include adverse childhood experiences resulting from trauma as well as bullying. Examples of traumatic experiences include child abuse or neglect, parental divorce, or the death of a parent or caregiver. The main component of an adverse experience is the lack of emotional and social support from family, friends,

caregivers, or educators. Other traumatic experiences can include growing up in poverty, bullying by peers, or medical conditions requiring extensive treatment.

In adults, childhood experiences can carry forward and combine with lived experience predisposing adults to anxiety disorders. Generally, women are more likely to experience anxiety disorders than men. Additionally, adults older than 55 are less likely to experience an anxiety disorder than persons younger than 55. Adults can also experience traumatic events that predispose them to anxiety conditions. Some examples of traumatic events in adults include witnessing or experiencing violence, hearing others talk about traumatic events, experiencing a natural disaster, or losing a spouse or significant other. Chronic stress from life and job problems may also cause symptoms of anxiety. In some instances, anxiety may result from genetic predisposition instead of prior experiences. Lastly, anxiety symptoms can occur or worsen because of certain chronic health conditions.

Dealing with anxiety

When someone experiences symptoms of anxiety, it may be difficult to recognize the symptoms or reach out for help. If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of anxiety or has an anxiety condition, you can use some simple tips to help cope with anxiety symptoms. Educate yourself about symptoms or conditions, avoid fast foods, and prioritize sleep by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. Increase your physical activity by moving around more during the day, and avoid alcohol and drugs. Reduce stress by keeping tasks simple, seeking social support, and using coping skills like breathing techniques to help manage your stress. Creating a plan for self-care and work can also reduce anxiety symptoms. It is important to take medications as prescribed and speak with your primary care provider to manage

chronic health conditions, like lung or heart disease, which can worsen anxiety.

Lastly, if you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of anxiety or has a worsening anxiety disorder, reach out to a health professional for an evaluation. You can contact your primary care provider, a counselor, a therapist, or a psychiatrist. **You can also text 988 to speak with a trained mental health professional.**



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