

Teens and Anxiety

Everyone, at some time, feels anxious. For teens, today's fast-paced lifestyle and daily pressures can add to the stress and anxiety they sometimes feel. Though it can seem bigger than life; that type of stress usually goes away after a short time. We complete the project, finish the task, or solve the problem that caused the anxious feelings, or sometimes time just passes and it gets better. For an adolescent suffering from an anxiety disorder, however, this is just not the case.

Anxiety disorders refer to a group of illnesses which include Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Phobias, Panic Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. As a group, anxiety disorders are the most common psychiatric disorder in the United States. At any one time, up to 13% of all teenagers are dealing with a significant anxiety disorder.

A person suffering from an anxiety disorder has tension that affects the body and mind, causing the heart to race, breathing to get shallow and faster, and the whole nervous system to react as if the person is in real danger.

The most common type of anxiety disorder, phobias, affects 12 percent of all Americans at some point in their lifetime. The illness, in which a person avoids certain things because they become overwhelmed with feelings of terror or dread when faced with a certain object, situation or activity, may interfere with all aspects of life; a job, school, family life or social relationships.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, a disorder that develops in response to a traumatic situation a person has experienced, is often associated with survivors of accidents, war veterans or victims, or people who have suffered physical attacks. Teens with PTSD may relive their experience in flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and memories, or nightmares, and have trouble overcoming the fear and guilt they are feeling.

Obsessive compulsive disorder affects over 2 million Americans in any given six month period. Adolescents with this disorder suffer from obsessions (repeated, unwanted thoughts) and compulsions (rituals or routines which must be completed). Some examples of obsessive compulsive disorder are excessive hand washing, repeating a phrase over and over or constantly checking to make sure you've turned off the stove.

Panic disorder sufferers can experience intense, overwhelming terror at any time, and it can start out for no apparent reason. Shaking, hot flashes, a racing heart, trouble getting air or shortness of breath are some of the symptoms that generally accompany a panic attack.. Certain situations or objects may provoke the attack, though they do not necessarily need to be present for the attack to occur. Panic disorder afflicts 1.5 million Americans during any 6 month period.

Generalized anxiety disorder sufferers are consumed with unrealistic thoughts about real life issues. Excessive worries about family finances, health issues, even world affairs, may cause the teen to become tense or anxious and keep them from completing their daily activities. Commonly, these worries are needless, as the person suffering from the disorder truly has nothing to be concerned about, or the concerns are out of proportion.

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Anxiety disorders are, fortunately, some of the most treatable psychiatric illnesses. There are many good reasons to remain optimistic when diagnosed with a type of anxiety disorder. Therapy can teach skills for reacting differently to the anxiety, gradually gaining control over it so that the symptoms lessen and sometimes go away. Medications, sometimes used in conjunction with behavior therapy or behavior modification techniques, have also proven to be quite effective in the treatment of anxiety disorders. Success rates for each individual type of anxiety disorder mentioned above may differ, but all have a moderately high recovery rate. Through treatment, an adolescent can overcome their anxiety disorder, or at the very least learn to control and cope with its effects.

The Acadia Hospital offers rapid access to a wide array of services for youth living with an anxiety disorder. To schedule an evaluation please call 1-800-640-1211 or 973-6100.



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