

What kind of anxiety disorder do you have? As with every health issue, an accurate diagnosis is essential. A few common anxiety disorders include: Generalized anxiety disorder: A pattern of excessive worry about a variety of issues on most days for at least six months, often accompanied by physical symptoms, such as muscle tension, a hammering heart, or dizziness. Social anxiety disorder: Feeling significant anxiety in social situations or when called on to perform in front of others, such as in public speaking. Phobias: A particular animal, insect, object, or situation causes substantial anxiety. Panic disorder: Panic attacks are sudden, intense episodes of heart-banging fear, breathlessness, and dread. "It's the feeling you'd have if you just missed being hit by a Mack truck — but for people with panic disorder there is no Mack truck," says Dr. Beresin. The costs of anxiety Constant anxiety levies a toll on health. For example, anxiety increases levels of the stress hormone cortisol, raising blood pressure, which contributes over time to heart problems, stroke, kidney disease, and sexual dysfunction. And a 2017 Lancet study using brain scans measured activity in an area called the amygdala, which mounts split-second responses to danger and encodes memories of frightening events. Greater activity in the amygdala correlated with higher risk for heart disease and stroke, possibly, the researchers speculated, by triggering immune system production of extra white cells to fight perceived threats. In people struggling with emotional stress, this might drive inflammation and plaque formation that leads to heart attacks and strokes. Quality of life suffers, too. Intrusive thoughts, dread of panic attacks, intense self-consciousness and fear of rejection, and other hallmarks of anxiety disorders compel people to avoid anxiety-provoking situations. This interferes with relationships, work, school, and activities as people isolate themselves, turn down opportunities, and forgo possible joys in life. There are effective treatments for anxiety Treatment is tailored to the diagnosis. Effective options include: Lifestyle changes, such as skipping caffeine, exercising regularly, and avoiding medicines or substances that might cause anxiety symptoms. Mind-body approaches, such as deep breathing, meditation, mindfulness, and techniques to ease muscle tension and promote calm. Psychotherapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and exposure therapy. CBT teaches people to challenge and reframe distorted or unhelpful anxious thinking, because thoughts influence feelings and actions. Exposure therapy helps people tolerate and calm anxiety by gradually exposing a person to feared situations or objects under guidance from a therapist. Medicines, such as short-acting drugs called benzodiazepines, which are taken as needed when anxiety spikes. Low doses of some antidepressants, particularly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), help relieve anxiety when taken daily. Often, a combination of approaches is best. Relieving anxiety with medicine while using CBT or exposure therapy to strengthen coping skills and help retrain the brain can do much to make anxiety manageable.