

Coping with Social Anxiety Disorder

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Many of us will feel nervous when meeting new people, speaking publicly or attending parties and social events – but what does it mean when this apprehension becomes overwhelming or affects day-to-day life?

Social anxiety is a mental health disorder that causes people to feel intense fear of social situations and interactions. Individuals with social anxiety may experience excessive worry when meeting unfamiliar people, speaking in front of a group, interacting with cashiers and phone operators or using public restrooms. Often, this anxiety is rooted in the fear of being judged or embarrassing yourself in front of others.

The Signs of Social Anxiety

Social anxiety extends far further than simply worrying about social interactions. For many people, the physical symptoms of anxiety can be just as prominent as the mental symptoms. Along with a heightened sense of dread, uneasiness and restlessness, the physical symptoms of social anxiety include:

- Sweating
- Trembling
- An increased or irregular heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Pins and needles
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Insomnia

Managing Social Anxiety

If you've been experiencing social anxiety for a period of six months or longer, it's important to take steps to manage the condition before it begins to disrupt your daily life. If left untreated, social anxiety can lead to isolation, depression and addiction and can even increase the risk of certain stress-related illnesses by compromising the immune system. Luckily, there are plenty of things you can do to set the wheels of recovery in motion, such as:

- Keeping physically active and getting plenty of fresh air
- Eating a well-balanced, nourishing diet
- Limiting or avoiding caffeine, alcohol and nicotine consumption
- Practicing mindfulness and stress reduction techniques, including yoga, meditation and breathing exercises
- Joining a local or online support group where you can share your experiences and learn how others manage their own social anxiety

It's also extremely beneficial to build up your confidence and coping skills by exposing yourself to social situations in small doses. You might want to do this by having a friend or family member accompany you to a public setting you'd normally avoid, asking a shop assistant for help or slowly increasing eye contact and interactions with others. If you set small goals such as these and stick with them, you should begin to feel less overwhelmed when these situations arise in your day-to-day life.

If you feel like you need a bit more help managing your social anxiety, it's a good idea to speak to your GP to learn about the various treatments available to you. Your doctor will be able to assess your symptoms and suggest the best course of action, which may involve:

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: Generally considered the most effective treatment for social or generalised anxiety disorders, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a talk-based therapy that involves working with a professional practitioner to identify and re-frame negative thinking or behaviour patterns.

Medication: Your GP may suggest certain medications to manage the physical symptoms of anxiety and quiet your mind so that you're in a better, more stable position to overcome the disorder.

Finding the Positives

While coping with social anxiety may be frustrating and exhausting, it's worth remembering that people who suffer with anxiety disorders are generally more in tune with their feelings – which in turn makes them much more sensitive and empathetic to the feelings of others. Those with anxiety also tend to be naturally gifted critical thinkers, which can benefit both mental and emotional intelligence, help strengthen response to threat and even boost memory.

Extra Support

If you're in need of support and your employer offers Vivup's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), you can access help and resources 24/7, 365 days a year including a 24-hour telephone helpline for confidential, independent support and short-term low intensity help.

A range of downloadable self-help workbooks providing insight, advice and support across a range of topics including Social Anxiety are also accessible through Vivup's EAP.

Sources

[Social Anxiety \(Social Phobia\) – NHS](#)

[Social Anxiety Disorder: Diagnosis & Treatment – Mayo Clinic](#)

[Causes of Social Anxiety – Bridges to Recovery](#)