



## Anxiety Disorders

*BQIS Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This document provides general information on the topic and is not intended to replace team assessment, decision-making, or medical advice.*

### Intended Outcomes

Individuals will understand the symptoms, common causes, and treatment of anxiety disorders.

### Definitions

**Anxiety disorders:** Anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic attacks, panic disorder, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

### Facts

- Anxiety disorders affect an estimated 40 million adult Americans.
- These disorders are the result of a complex interaction of risk factors including genetics, biology, personality, and life events.
- Anxiety disorders are often treatable.
- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) includes symptoms of excessive daily worry about several topics (such as health, finances, career) lasting six (6) months or more, accompanied by restlessness, fatigue, trouble concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, and disturbed sleep. Often physical symptoms such as clammy hands, dry mouth, nausea, diarrhea, or a “lump” in the throat may occur.
- Panic attacks can occur as part of several different anxiety disorders. The common feature of a panic attack is a period of intense fear or discomfort, accompanied by a number of physical and psychological symptoms, which is of sudden onset and builds to a peak rapidly (usually ten (10) minutes or less). Accompanying symptoms can include heart palpitations (rapid, strong, or irregular heartbeat), sweating, trembling, shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea, lightheadedness, and intense fear. Panic attacks can accompany GAD, phobias, and PTSD.
- Panic disorder is characterized by recurrent, unexpected panic attacks, followed by at least one (1) month of persistent fear of having another attack, worry about the possible consequences of an attack, or a significant change in behavior (such as not going out in public) due to fear of an attack.



# HEALTH & SAFETY: PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS

## Anxiety Disorders

### FACT SHEET

- Phobias are intense fear reactions to specific objects or situations (such as heights, spiders, storms, injections, flying). The level of fear is not consistent with actual danger and is recognized by the sufferer as irrational.
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is characterized by persistent, recurrent, exaggerated fears (or obsessions), such as fear of contamination or fear of acting violently. These obsessions may lead the individual to perform rituals (or compulsions) such as hand washing, counting, or hoarding to relieve their anxiety.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can occur following exposure to a traumatic event such as a sexual or physical assault, witnessing a violent crime, or living through a natural disaster. Symptoms of PTSD include re-experiencing the event (having flashbacks or nightmares), avoiding places related to the traumatic event, and emotional numbing (experiencing a detachment from others). Symptoms such as trouble sleeping, startling easily, and irritability may also occur.
- Treatment strategies:
  - Anxiety disorders can be treated with medications and psychotherapy. Medications called SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) are the most beneficial in the long run. These medications include citalopram (Celexa), escitalopram (Lexapro), fluoxetine (Prozac, Prozac Weekly), paroxetine (Paxil, Paxil CR, Pexeva), and sertraline (Zoloft).
  - Psychotherapy such as cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) can be very beneficial in the treatment of anxiety disorders.
  - Generally, a combination of medication and therapy is most effective.



### Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Give medications as prescribed.
2. Watch for anything different/change in status of the individual and for signs and symptoms of medication side effects.
3. Write down any noted signs and symptoms of side effects of medications and changes in status of the individual.
4. Tell the supervisor or nurse about any noted signs and symptoms of medication side effects and changes in status of the individual immediately, according to the seriousness of symptoms as per agency policy.
5. Seek medical attention as indicated according to the seriousness of symptoms as per agency policy.
6. Watch for the effectiveness of medication by writing down target behavior data that relates to the diagnosis.
7. Make sure all data reports including weight, sleep pattern, and target behavior frequency and intensity are presented to physician or psychiatrist during scheduled appointments.



### Learning Assessment

The following questions can be used to verify a person's competency regarding the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. Anxiety disorders include:
  - A. Obsessive-compulsive disorder
  - B. Panic disorder
  - C. Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - D. All of the above
2. Risk factors for anxiety disorders include:
  - A. Traumatic experience
  - B. Genetic factors
  - C. Personality factors
  - D. All of the above
3. Panic attacks typically last:
  - A. Ten (10) minutes or less
  - B. One (1) hour
  - C. 24 hours
  - D. None of the above
4. The most effective treatment of anxiety disorders includes:
  - A. Medications
  - B. Psychotherapy
  - C. Combination of medication and psychotherapy
  - D. None of the above



5. To help monitor the condition of someone receiving an antipsychotic medication, it is important to do all of the following except:
- A. Watch for any changes in the individual
  - B. Write down observations of possible side effects of medications
  - C. Report to your supervisor how the person is doing every other month
  - D. Take notes of any changes in behavior or weight to medical appointments for the physician/psychiatrists.

## References

Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Understanding the facts of anxiety disorders and depression is the first step. Retrieved 07/31/2015 from <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>.

National Institutes of Health: National Institute of Mental Health. What are anxiety disorders? (May 2015). Retrieved 07/31/2015 from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>

University of Maryland Medical Center. Anxiety disorders. Retrieved 07/31/2015 from <http://umm.edu/health/medical/reports/articles/anxiety-disorders>.

## Related Resources

Psychiatric Medication Series Fact Sheet “SSRIs and SNRIs”

## Learning Assessment Answers

- 1. D
- 2. D
- 3. A
- 4. C
- 5. C