



# The Rise of Social Anxiety Disorder in America

We all experience anxiety in our lives: when giving a speech, interviewing for a job or even attending a social gathering. It's typical to feel nervous in these situations. For most people, these feelings don't last or they lessen with experience and age. This isn't the case for individuals who suffer from social anxiety disorder — for them, any kind of social situations can provoke intense fear and embarrassment, causing them to avoid people and hindering their ability to live full lives.

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is on the rise. In the United States, approximately 15 million adults — 7.1% of the population — grapple with this condition annually, according to the most recent statistics. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America suggests that even those figures don't capture the full scope of the problem, since many individuals remain undiagnosed.

## In Young People

The onset of social anxiety disorder often occurs in adolescence around the age of 13, when individuals are forging their identities in complex peer interactions. The pressure to fit in, gain acceptance and conform to societal expectations can be overwhelming. The early teenage years are characterized by a heightened sensitivity to social evaluation, making adolescents more susceptible to the fear of judgment, rejection or embarrassment.

Identifying a single cause of the surge in social anxiety is complex, as many factors contribute to its development. The aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its isolating effects and prolonged periods of social withdrawal, has undoubtedly exacerbated the situation, entrenching reclusive habits among those already grappling with social anxiety. Another factor is the rise of social media, with its countless opportunities for connection without face-to-face interaction. Younger generations are



15 million U.S. adults grapple with social anxiety each year.

Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA)

[More on Page 2](#)

LCT00122-20240408





susceptible, with easy access to these platforms from an early age. As virtual interactions increasingly replace in-person social development during formative years, the escalating prevalence of SAD among children and adolescents has become a logical outcome.

### In Adults

The burdens of SAD extend into adulthood as well. The demands of professional life, coupled with societal expectations, can amplify feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Social interactions become a minefield of potential judgment, leading to avoidance and isolation as coping mechanisms.

### In Seniors

Past the demands of adulthood, social anxiety can persist into the later stages of life. Seniors, especially those living alone or in care facilities, may face social isolation, a significant risk factor for mental health issues. The loss of loved ones, physical limitations and societal neglect can contribute to a deepening sense of loneliness.

### Approaches to Treatment

Navigating the complexities of SAD requires a comprehensive understanding of available treatment options. The first step often involves seeking professional help. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has shown remarkable efficacy in treating social anxiety by addressing negative thought patterns and behaviors. Exposure therapy, a subset of CBT, involves gradually exposing individuals to feared social situations, helping build resilience and coping mechanisms.

Medication can also play a role in managing symptoms. Antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications may be prescribed to alleviate the emotional burden associated with social anxiety disorder. However, these should be considered in conjunction with therapy for optimal results.

In addition to formal treatments, lifestyle modifications can contribute significantly to managing social anxiety. Regular exercise, adequate sleep and a balanced diet can positively impact mental health. Engaging in social activities, even on a small scale, can provide opportunities for gradual desensitization and improvement.

### #MentalHealth #MakeltMainstream

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issue, help is out there. Contact the Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line (Text MHA to 741-741).

