

The Rise of Social Anxiety Disorder in America

Everyone feels nervous at times. You might feel anxious before a speech, a job interview or a social event. For most people, these feelings are brief and fade with time. But for people with social anxiety disorder, even simple social situations can cause strong fear. They may avoid people and activities, which can make daily life very hard.

Social anxiety disorder is becoming more common in the United States. Many adults live with this condition, and many people never get diagnosed.

Social anxiety in young people

Social anxiety often begins in early teen years, around age 13. Teens are trying to fit in and build friendships. They may worry about being judged or embarrassed. This worry can grow into fear and cause them to avoid others.

Many factors can increase this anxiety. The COVID-19 pandemic led to long periods of isolation. Some young people became used to staying apart from others. Social media can also play a role. Teens may spend more time online and less time practicing face-to-face social skills. This can make real-life interactions feel more stressful.

Social anxiety in adults

Adults with social anxiety may avoid meetings, gatherings or work events. They may feel judged at work or fear making mistakes. Stress from jobs, finances and family life can make symptoms worse. Many adults cope by avoiding social situations, which can lead to loneliness.

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About 15 million adults in the U.S. deal with social anxiety each year.

— Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA)

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Social anxiety in seniors

Social anxiety can continue later in life. Seniors may live alone or in care homes, which can lead to isolation. Health problems, loss of loved ones and fewer social opportunities can also increase fear or sadness. Without support, these feelings may grow stronger.

How social anxiety can be treated

Many treatments can help people manage social anxiety. A first step is talking with a mental health professional. Cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, is one of the most effective treatments. It helps people change negative thoughts and face social situations in small steps. Exposure therapy, a type of CBT, helps people slowly build confidence.

Medication can also help some people. Doctors may prescribe antidepressants or anti-anxiety medicines to ease symptoms. Medication often works best when combined with therapy.

Healthy habits can also support treatment. Regular exercise, good sleep and balanced meals can improve mood and lower stress. Taking small steps to connect with others can help build comfort and reduce fear over time.

#MentalHealthMatters

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

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