

COMMON MENTAL DISORDERS

Anxiety disorders: panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias

Anxiety is a natural human emotion. It involves feelings of uneasiness or dread, sometimes even fear. Feeling anxious can be a reaction to stress, like before taking a test or making an important decision. Anxiety can even give a boost of energy to face the task ahead. But for some people, anxiety isn't just a temporary reaction to stressful events. Anxiety that does not end might indicate the presence of what is called an **anxiety disorder**. The term is used to describe feelings that are both lasting and overwhelming. When the anxiety gets worse and does not go away, it can interfere with daily activities like schoolwork, job performance, and relationships. People suffering from anxiety disorders may have anxious thoughts that are hard to control. Tense and restless feelings don't go away and ultimately interfere with daily life. Physical symptoms, including unexplained aches and pains, shortness of breath, and dizziness, can accompany these feelings. Although many people struggle with anxiety disorder, the specific causes are unknown, although traumatic events can be a source.

Mental health experts describe several kinds of anxiety disorders including panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and phobias.

- **Panic disorder** describes unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear without a known stressor. Strong physical symptoms are experienced during a **panic attack**. The sufferer may have chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, and even abdominal distress.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder** describes the experience of recurring, disturbing thoughts about things like germs or harming others. These thoughts lead to actions believed to reduce the obsessive thoughts. Compulsions can include excessive handwashing, counting, checking on things, or ordering things precisely.
- **Phobias** describe uncontrollable, irrational, or lasting fear of a certain object, situation, or activity. The fear can be so overwhelming that the source of the fear is avoided. Phobias can be to things as well as to places. Examples include **agoraphobia**, fear of crowded places or fear of being embarrassed and unable to escape, and **social phobia**, fear of being humiliated in performance situations like giving a speech or even eating in public.

Mood disorders: depression, bipolar disorder

Mood disorders are affective disorders, meaning that they affect people emotionally. The two major mood disorders are depression and bipolar disorder.

- **Depression** is the mood disorder that causes persistent sadness and a loss of interest in the activities of daily living. Depression isn't just feeling sad or "blue." It is a serious illness that can come in short or long episodes causing everything from sleep disorders to thoughts of suicide. Depression is considered a disorder of the brain with a variety of causes, including brain chemistry, hormones, inherited traits, and environmental factors.
- Depression is one part of **bipolar disorder**, which is the disorder characterized by intense mood swings. People with bipolar disorder feel extremely up or energized (a **manic episode**) but at other times feel down, indifferent, or hopeless (a **depressive episode**). Although the exact cause of bipolar disorder is unknown, factors can include genetics, brain function, and environment.

Eating disorders: anorexia, bulimia, binge-eating disorder

Eating disorders are serious health conditions that involve focusing too much on weight, body shape, and food. These eating behaviors put the body at risk of not getting proper nutrition. This can harm the heart, teeth, bones, mouth, and digestive system. The medical community has found eating disorders to be linked to depression, anxiety, self-harm, as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Three of the most common eating disorders are anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating disorder.

- **Anorexia** leads to an unhealthy, low body weight caused by an intense fear of gaining weight. It can include restricting calories and other extreme measures to lose weight like excessive exercising, laxatives, and vomiting after eating.
- **Bulimia** includes episodes of eating extremely large amounts of food in a short period, followed by episodes of purging through vomiting, laxatives, and severe calorie restriction. Like other eating disorders, bulimia is caused in part by a preoccupation with weight and body shape combined with harsh self-judgment of physical appearance.
- **Binge-eating disorder** involves eating food for a short period but not purging afterward. After a binge, people feel guilt, disgust, or shame, which causes a vicious cycle of bingeing. Like other mental illnesses, the cause of eating disorders is not known, but trauma and other mental health issues like anxiety, depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder may be contributing factors.

Personality disorders

Personality disorders are made up of complex mental disorders that affect **personality**, defined as patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The mental health community identifies ten types of personality disorders. All of them involve long-term patterns of thoughts and behaviors that are **non-normative**, meaning that they are different from what is considered normal in any given culture. These thoughts and behaviors cause problems with how people see themselves. All ten disorders also cause problems in relationships. Among the most recognized personality disorders are **narcissistic personality disorder**, **paranoid personality disorder**, and **borderline personality disorder**. These three all involve unusual thoughts leading to behaviors that prevent healthy relationships. The causes of all ten personality disorders may include childhood experiences such as abuse and other forms of trauma in life.

Psychotic disorders

Psychotic disorders are severe mental disorders. They cause abnormal thinking and loss of touch with reality. One of the most common psychotic disorders is schizophrenia. It is a complex brain disorder caused by a chemical imbalance. It has troubling symptoms. Some of these include delusions, false beliefs not based on reality; hallucinations, seeing, hearing, or feeling things that aren't real; paranoia, feeling that someone is out to get them; and sometimes withdrawal from others. Schizophrenia can run in families, but environmental factors have not been ruled out as a cause.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Feeling upset or extremely anxious after a frightening event is normal. However, people who suffer from **post-traumatic stress disorder** (PTSD) keep reliving the event for months or years afterward. They often avoid the things that might remind them of the traumatic event. These events can include physical or sexual assault, car accidents, and natural disasters. PTSD can develop after any type of traumatic event, but it is often associated with military service members and veterans. People with PTSD suffer from flashbacks, nightmares, or uncontrollable memories. These can create serious emotional pain and problems at home, work, school, and relationships. Sometimes PTSD can happen to a person who just witnesses someone else experiencing trauma. Many people with PTSD experience other mental health disorders like depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

Resources

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