

Social anxiety disorder (social phobia)

In social anxiety disorder, also called social phobia, everyday interactions cause significant anxiety, fear, self-consciousness and embarrassment because you fear being scrutinized or judged by others.

Symptoms



In contrast to everyday nervousness, social anxiety disorder includes fear, anxiety and avoidance that interferes with your daily routine, work, school or other activities.

Emotional and behavioral symptoms

Signs and symptoms of social anxiety disorder can include persistent:

- Fear of situations in which you may be judged
- Worrying about embarrassing or humiliating yourself
- Concern that you'll offend someone
- Intense fear of interacting or talking with strangers
- Fear that others will notice that you look anxious
- Fear of physical symptoms that may cause you embarrassment, such as blushing, sweating, trembling or having a shaky voice
- Avoiding doing things or speaking to people out of fear of embarrassment
- Avoiding situations where you might be the center of attention
- Having anxiety in anticipation of a feared activity or event
- Spending time after a social situation analyzing your performance and identifying flaws in your interactions
- Expecting the worst possible consequences from a negative experience during a social situation

For children, anxiety about interacting with adults or peers may be shown by crying, having temper tantrums, clinging to parents or refusing to speak in social situations.

Performance type of social anxiety disorder is when you experience intense fear and anxiety only during speaking or performing in public, but not in other types of social situations.

Physical symptoms

Physical signs and symptoms can sometimes accompany social anxiety disorder and may include:

- Fast heartbeat
- Upset stomach or nausea
- Trouble catching your breath
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Confusion or feeling "out of body"
- Diarrhea
- Muscle tension

Avoiding normal social situations

Common, everyday experiences that may be hard to endure when you have social anxiety disorder include, for example:

- Using a public restroom
- Interacting with strangers
- Eating in front of others
- Making eye contact
- Initiating conversations
- Dating
- Attending parties or social gatherings
- Missing work or school
- Entering a room in which people are already seated
- Returning items to a store

Social anxiety disorder symptoms can change over time. They may flare up if you're facing a lot of stress or demands. Although avoiding anxiety-producing situations may make you feel better in the short term, your anxiety is likely to persist over the long term if you don't get treatment.

When to see a mental health professional

See your mental health provider if you fear and avoid normal social situations because they cause embarrassment, worry or panic. If this type of anxiety disrupts your life, causes severe stress and affects your daily activities, you may have social anxiety disorder or another mental health condition that requires treatment to get better.