

Body wise

Anxious moments!

Do you hit the panic button at the drop of a hat? You could well be suffering from anxiety disorders. Read on...

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What is anxiety disorder? An anxiety disorder is characterised by chronic anxiety, which disturbs mood, thoughts, behaviour and physiological activities. The anxiety generally grows progressively worse without treatment and affects the individual's functioning. Anxiety disorders include panic disorder, phobias, generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Approximately 30 per cent of women experience some type of anxiety disorder during their lifetime. Moreover, women are two to three times more likely to be affected by GAD and PTSD than men.

What predisposes you towards having these disorders? Family history, anxious personality, and hormonal changes. Stressful life events may also trigger anxiety disorders in vulnerable individuals.

What exactly are panic disorders? Individuals with panic disorder experience frequent, intense feelings of fear called 'panic attacks'. Symptoms include rapid heartbeat, chest pain, breathing difficulty, sweating, chills, hot flashes, fear of death, feeling of 'going crazy', trembling, or feelings of tingling and numbness, stomach distress, feeling out of control, and dizziness.

Is GAD more predominant among women? Yes. Symptoms include constant worrying, aches and pains including headaches, trembling and muscle tension, inability to relax, lack of focus, constant fatigue, irritability and grouchiness, sleep problems and hot flashes or night sweats.

What are the symptoms of PTSD? Sleep difficulties, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing, irritability, depression, loss of interest in things previously enjoyed and inability to feel affection, aggressiveness or occasional violence depending on the cause of the disorder.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a common term. What is it? OCD is characterised by frequently recurring and upsetting thoughts or 'obsessions'. Repetitive actions called 'compulsions' may occur which, are attempts to stop the obsessive thoughts. Women with OCD may have upsetting thoughts about bacteria, fear of hurting themselves or others, and strange thoughts about religion or sexual activity, etc. Sometimes, compulsions include things like uncontrollable hand washing, excessive attempts to organise and clean, counting and checking things. Depression often co-exists with any of the anxiety disorders.

The questions have been answered by Dr. SHAMSAH SONAWALLA, consultant psychiatrist, Jaslok Hospital

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Anxiety disorders remain under recognised and under treated. Recognition is the first step towards treatment.

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A thorough assessment is necessary.

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Check for conditions such as anemia, thyroid and other hormone-related disorders when relevant.

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A combination of medication, psychotherapy and lifestyle changes work best.

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Regular exercise, relaxation techniques, yoga and meditation can also help.



