

ARC Young Adult Mental Health Information Series

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Social Anxiety

Social anxiety disorder involves a fear or extreme worry about being humiliated or scrutinized in social situations with symptoms being experienced for a period at least 6 months. These feelings are experienced on emotional, physical, and cognitive levels, causing severe discomfort that can lead to social avoidance. There are two types of social anxiety disorder-performance anxiety involving the fear of being in front of groups and generalized social anxiety where a variety of social situations create symptoms. Approximately 7% of Canadian adults, 15 years and older, experience social anxiety disorder.



Symptoms

Emotional Symptoms

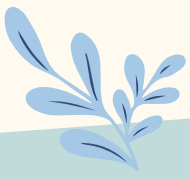
- Worry about embarrassing or humiliating yourself.
- Intense fear of interacting or talking with strangers.
- Fear that others will notice that you look anxious.
- Avoidance of doing things or speaking to people out of fear of embarrassment.
- Avoidance of situations where you might be the center of attention.
- Anxiety in anticipation of a feared activity or event.
- Intense fear or anxiety during social situations.
- Analysis of your performance and identification of flaws in your interactions after a social situation.
- Expectation of the worst possible consequences from a negative experience during a social situation.

Physical Symptoms

- Blushing
- Sweating
- Dry mouth
- Rapid heart beat
- Trembling or shaking
- Tightness in chest

In children, anxiety may be expressed by crying, throwing tantrums, freezing, clinging, shrinking or failing to speak in social situations.





Causes and Risk factors

- Increased blood flow to the amygdala (a part of the limbic system responsible for fear) has been shown in brain images of people with Social Anxiety Disorder. Other parts of the brain involved in anxiety include the brain stem (controls heart rate and breathing), the prefrontal cortex (helps appraise risk and danger), and the motor cortex (controls your muscles).
- As with all anxiety disorders, there is a significant genetic predisposition to developing social anxiety disorder.
- Unhealthy coping mechanisms (like conflict avoidance) and anxious responses or behaviours can be learned by way of observation of authority figures and peer groups.
- Certain physical characteristics that stand out as unusual to the surrounding social norm can contribute to social anxiety.
- Exhibiting excessive apprehension of new activities, people, places, or things can be an early sign of Social Anxiety Disorder. This is often shown through extreme shyness or crying when meeting new people.
- Any major life changes, whether positive or negative, may be an underlying trigger for SAD.

Treatment

Fewer than 5% of people with SAD will seek treatment within a year following the initial onset of the disorder, and more than a third of people report experiencing symptoms for 10 or more years before getting help. Therapy, specifically cognitive-behavioural therapy, and medication are used in the treatment and management of social anxiety disorder. Medication is most effective for the short-term control of symptoms but will not be an effective treatment long-term without therapy. Additional coping mechanisms include joining support groups, avoiding caffeine, practicing mindfulness, and regularly exercising.

Resources available

Aire Ouverte for youth 12-25 years of age. 5811 Taschereau Blvd., local 30, Brossard, QC J4Z 1A5
Drop-in services: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 1:00-8:00 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. By appointment from Monday to Friday. (450) 445-4474.

AMI-Quebec – www.amiquebec.org, (514) 486-1448

Friends for mental health – www.asmfmh.org, (514) 636-6885

Relief, www.relief.ca – (514) 529-3081

Psychosocial support available at your local CLSC and through your primary care physician.

CLSC St-Hubert (450) 443-7400

CLSC Brossard (450) 445-4452

CLSC St-Jean-sur-Richelieu (450) 358-2572

CLSC Richelieu (450) 658-7561

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