

TeensHealth

All About Anxiety

It's 1:15 AM and Morgan can't sleep because she's worried about the math test she has in the morning. Actually, it seems like she worries about almost everything these days. What if she oversleeps and misses the bus? Did she remember to put pads in her bag in case she gets her period tomorrow? Why hadn't Maya called her back tonight? How will she work at the store all day Saturday and still have time to write the paper that's due on Monday? It's another 45 minutes before Morgan is finally able to drift off.

It's completely normal to worry about your hectic, complicated life, but if the worries become overwhelming, you may feel that they're running your life. If you spend an excessive amount of time feeling anxious or you have difficulty sleeping because of your anxiety, pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. They may be symptoms of an anxiety problem or disorder.

What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a natural part of life, and most of us experience it from time to time. The word "anxiety" usually refers to worry, concern, stress, or nervousness. For most teens, anxiety is limited to particular situations such as tests, important dates (like the prom), or driving lessons.

Feeling anxious can sometimes be a good thing. Anxiety can actually help you by motivating you to prepare for a big test or by keeping you on your toes in potentially dangerous situations. Occasional anxiety isn't something to be concerned about.

But for some teens, anxiety is a constant factor in their lives. When a person has an anxiety disorder, it interferes with their ability to function normally on a daily basis. Anxiety disorders can cause teens to suffer from intense, long-lasting fear or worry, in addition to other symptoms.

Understanding Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are conditions that involve unrealistic fear and worry. Anxiety disorders are very common - it is estimated that they affect about 13% of the U.S. population. Anxiety disorders affect people of all ages, including kids and teens.

A teen who has an anxiety disorder isn't "crazy," and certainly isn't alone. Many teens have anxiety disorders, and have feelings of fear, worry, panic, or intense stress that can sometimes make it hard to get through the day. Anxiety can also interfere with things as basic as sleep, concentration, and appetite, not to mention the ability to enjoy life and relax. The good news is that anxiety disorders are very treatable.

There are several types of anxiety disorders that can affect teens. They include:

- **Generalized anxiety disorder**, or GAD, for example, refers to constant, intense worry and stress about a variety of everyday things or situations. Teens with GAD may worry about