

Sometimes it turns out that as soon as the person processes the information in the thinking part of the brain (the cerebral cortex), which happens just moments later, the person realizes there's really no danger. The person then relaxes, and this fight or flight response stops.

But the amygdala is programmed to "remember" the trigger that set this process in motion in case it happens again. This is the brain's attempt to protect the person from future danger by keeping track of all cues that might signal danger. So, for example, if the person encounters the same thing that scared him once before (even if the person later realized it wasn't dangerous), the amygdala may activate the same anxiety reaction. It's possible for the amygdala to begin to overreact, and for the person to mistakenly interpret certain things as dangerous.

### **How Are Anxiety Disorders Diagnosed and Treated?**

Some people go to their medical doctor because they're worried about the physical symptoms associated with anxiety. This is a good idea because symptoms like palpitations, chest pain, stomachaches, vomiting, shortness of breath, shakiness, numbness or tingling, or sleeping problems can be caused by certain medical illnesses.

A doctor can examine a person to determine whether he has any medical conditions that need treatment. But if the doctor doesn't find a medical cause for the symptoms, and sees that there's a certain pattern of physical symptoms, the doctor may diagnose anxiety and refer the person to a mental health specialist.

If you think you may have an anxiety disorder, you need to see a mental health specialist, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist, for an evaluation. Don't wait to ask for help - anxiety can be overwhelming, and it can prevent you from enjoying yourself, your friends, school, and social activities. There are treatments that can help teens with anxiety disorders feel much better, often fairly quickly.

Some people with anxiety try to medicate or relax themselves by using alcohol and drugs (even things like sleeping pills), which may seem to make the anxiety or stress go away temporarily. This is not a good solution for several reasons. Drugs and alcohol create only a *false* sense of relaxation, can be dangerous, and can lead to lots of other problems, which can make it that much harder to function.

You can expect the mental health specialist to ask about your medical history, your family situation, the symptoms you've been experiencing, and your general well-being. Don't be surprised if some of the questions are very personal - your responses will help the doctor to understand you more fully and create a treatment plan that's right for you.

Treatment for anxiety may include medication, cognitive-behavioral therapy or other types of talk therapy, and relaxation or biofeedback to control tense muscles. A combination of treatments may be prescribed.

When medications are part of the treatment for anxiety, often a certain class of medications called SSRIs is used. This is sometimes confusing to people with anxiety because the SSRI medications are commonly referred to as "antidepressants."

Here's the scoop to clear up the confusion: the SSRI medications were first developed as antidepressants, but it was recognized that they also have anti-anxiety effects. So, how could they work for both? Because depression and anxiety both involve, among other things, an imbalance of