

## Social Anxiety Disorder



The Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA) is a national 501 (c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the prevention, treatment and cure of anxiety disorders and to improve the lives of all people who suffer from them. Help ADAA help others. Donate now at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).

*For information visit [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) or contact*

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“ I am so anxious around people that my heart beats out of control. I sweat. My face gets red. I just know everyone is staring at me. My voice cracks. I can't say a word. ”

# What is Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)?

Everyone can relate to feeling anxious before giving a presentation, asking someone out on a date or going on a job interview. Butterflies in your stomach, sweaty palms, pounding heart – all of these are normal feelings when confronting a new or intimidating social situation. But for the more than fifteen million Americans suffering from social anxiety disorder (SAD), also known as social phobia, the intense fear of being scrutinized and negatively evaluated by others in social or performance situations is so severe that they literally become “sick with fear.” This can happen in even the most seemingly non-threatening day-to-day social interactions, such as ordering food in a restaurant, signing one’s name in public or making a phone call.

Though they recognize that the fear is excessive and unreasonable, people with SAD feel powerless against their anxiety. They are terrified that they will act in a way that will be

embarrassing or humiliating. The anxiety interferes significantly with their daily routine, occupational performance or social life. Physical symptoms of SAD include blushing, profuse sweating, trembling, nausea, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, dizziness and headaches.

## What’s the difference between normal anxiety and SAD?

### Normal Anxiety

Feeling anxious prior to making a presentation, leading a meeting or asking your boss for a raise

Feeling shy and awkward when walking into a room full of strangers

Butterflies or jitters before a blind date

### SAD

Turning down a well-earned promotion that might involve occasional public speaking

Feeling too anxious to attend your office holiday party

Refusing a dinner invitation from someone you’ve known for years for fear of blushing and embarrassing yourself

## About Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a normal part of living. It’s the body’s way of telling us something isn’t right. It keeps us from harm’s way and prepares us to act quickly in the face of danger. However, for some people, anxiety is persistent, irrational and overwhelming. It may get in the way of day-to-day activities and

even make them impossible. This may be a sign of an anxiety disorder.

The term “anxiety disorders” describes a group of conditions including generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), **social anxiety disorder (SAD)** and specific phobias. For information on all of the anxiety disorders visit [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).

## How can SAD affect your life?

Social anxiety disorder can disrupt family life, reduce self-esteem and limit work efficiency. For some, it can be socially and economically devastating. It may make it difficult to complete school, interview and obtain jobs and create and maintain friendships and romantic partnerships.

SAD may be selective. A person may have an intense fear of a single circumstance such as giving a speech, talking to a salesperson or making a phone call but be perfectly comfortable in other social settings. Others may have a more generalized form of SAD. They become anxious in a variety of routine activities in which their performance might be observed, such as initiating or maintaining a conversation with strangers or people in authority, participating in meetings or classes or attending parties or dating.

## What causes SAD?

The exact cause of SAD is unknown, although studies suggest that biological, genetic and environmental factors play a role. SAD usually begins during early to mid teens, sometimes emerging out of a childhood history of shyness. It appears to run in families and is more common in women than in men.

## What treatments are available?

Fortunately, most individuals who seek treatment for SAD and other anxiety disorders see significant improvement and enjoy a better quality of life. A variety of treatment options are available including cognitive-behavioral therapies, anxiety management, relaxation techniques and medications. One, or a combination, of these may be recommended. Details about specific treatments are available on the ADAA website at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org).

It is important to remember that there is no single “right” treatment. What works for one person may or may not be the best choice for someone else. A course of treatment should be tailored to your



“ I was so relieved when my doctor put a name to my problem. To discover that there are other people like me. To learn that there is hope. ”

individual needs. Ask your doctor to explain why a particular type of treatment is being recommended, what other options are available and what you need to do to fully participate in your recovery.

## How can ADAA help you?

Suffering from SAD or any anxiety disorder can interfere with many aspects of your life. You may feel alone, embarrassed and frightened. ADAA can give you the resources that will help you and your loved ones better understand your condition, connect you with a community of people who know what you are experiencing and assist you in finding mental health professionals in your city who can help. Visit the ADAA website at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) to locate doctors and therapists who treat anxiety disorders in your area, as well as local support groups. Learn about the causes, symptoms and best treatments for all of the anxiety disorders, review questions to ask a therapist or doctor and find helpful books, tapes and other materials to help family and loved ones. ADAA is here to help you.

# Take Five & Manage Your Anxiety

Whether you have normal anxiety or an anxiety disorder, these strategies will help you cope:

1 Exercise. Go for a walk or jog. Do yoga. Dance. Just get moving!

2 Talk to someone... spouse, significant other, friend, child or doctor.

3 Keep a daily journal. Become aware of what triggers your anxiety.

4 Eat a balanced diet. Don't skip meals. Avoid caffeine which can trigger anxiety symptoms.

5 Contact ADAA at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org). Let us help you help yourself.

*You are not alone. Talk to someone – a friend, loved one or doctor. Get help. Anxiety disorders are real, serious and treatable.*

## Social Anxiety Disorder Self-Test

If you think you might have Social Anxiety Disorder, take the test below. Answer “yes” or “no” to the questions and discuss the results with your doctor.

**Yes or no? Are you troubled by:**

- Y  N An intense and persistent fear of a social situation in which other people might judge you?
- Y  N Fear that you will be humiliated by your actions?
- Y  N Fear that people will notice that you are blushing, sweating, trembling or showing other signs of anxiety?
- Y  N Knowing that your fear is excessive or unreasonable?

**Does the feared situation cause you to:**

- Y  N Always feel anxiety?
- Y  N Experience a “panic attack” during which you suddenly are overcome by intense fear or discomfort, including any of these symptoms?
- pounding heart
  - sweating
  - trembling or shaking
  - shortness of breath
  - choking
  - chest pain
  - nausea or abdominal discomfort
  - “jelly” legs

- dizziness
- feelings of unreality or being detached from yourself
- fear of losing control, going crazy
- fear of dying
- numbness or tingling sensations
- chills or hot flushes

- Y  N Go to great lengths to avoid participating in the feared situation?
- Y  N Does all of this interfere with your daily life?

Having more than one illness at the same time can make it difficult to diagnose and treat the different conditions. Conditions that sometimes complicate anxiety disorders include depression and substance abuse, among others.

**Yes or no? In the last year have you experienced:**

- Y  N Changes in sleeping or eating habits?
- Y  N Feeling sad or depressed more days than not?
- Y  N A disinterest in life more days than not?
- Y  N A feeling of worthlessness or guilt more days than not?

**During the last year, has the use of alcohol or drugs:**

- Y  N Resulted in failure with work, school or family?
- Y  N Placed you in a dangerous situation, such as driving under the influence?
- Y  N Gotten you arrested?
- Y  N Continued despite causing problems for you and/or your loved ones?