
Anxiety Disorders & Covid-

It is estimated that anywhere from 15-25% of seniors over the age of 55 suffer from symptoms of mental illnesses that are not part of the normal aging process. Affecting the most seniors, as many as 17%, is a group of diseases that are classified as anxiety disorders.

Yes, everyone has things they worry about. It's common and normal to be concerned about health problems, insurance coverage, financial issues and relationships. However, with anxiety disorders, reasonable concerns can turn into relentless and chronic fixations. And the stress of the Covid-19 crisis can magnify these concerns even more.

These obsessions can torment a person, create (or exacerbate) physical and emotional problems, and control one's life. Without intervention, the disorders can grow progressively worse, affecting one's health and straining relationships with family and friends.



Too much Covid-19 news can increase anxiety. Limit news updates on TV and internet. Instead, substitute with fun movies, sitcoms, games, reading/audio books.

Types Of Anxiety

Here is a list of anxiety disorders to watch out for. Most seniors with one of these diseases had the problem in earlier years. It was once believed the disorder would decline as they aged. Now it is felt that the vulnerability and stress of the aging process can act as a catalyst.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder - Constant worry and tension over everything. Expects the worst to happen, even though there is little or no reason to. Lasting at least 6 months, symptoms can include fatigue, headache, nausea, muscle tension and trembling. Common among seniors.

Panic Disorder - Repeated episodes of intense fear. Strikes frequently and without warning. Symptoms can include shortness of breath, chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, abdominal distress, feelings of unreality and fear of dying.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder - Unwanted thoughts or obsessive behaviors that are repeated to an extreme and seem impossible to stop or control.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - Response to witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event. Symptoms can include being easily startled, the numbing of emotions, nightmares, flashbacks, anger, depression, irritability and distraction.

Phobias - Persistent, involuntary, irrational fears. There are 2 major kinds of phobia.

- 1 **Social phobias** - An overwhelming fear of embarrassment, humiliation or scrutiny when in a social environment. Often leads to the avoidance of activities that have the potential to be pleasurable and meaningful. Common among seniors.
- 2 **Specific phobias** - An irrational, extreme and disabling fear of something that poses little or no real danger. Commonly leads to avoiding situations and objects that are the cause of the fear. Can create very severe limitations within a person's life and put extra strain on personal relationships.

(Sources: NIH, National Inst. of Mental Health, Anxiety Disorders Assn. of America)

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