

Understanding Social Anxiety Disorder

This material aims to provide you with a better understanding of what social anxiety disorder is and ways to manage the condition.

Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is a mental health condition characterised by an intense and persistent fear of social situations where individuals are exposed to possible scrutiny and judgement by others. Individuals with SAD often experience significant distress and avoidance of these situations, which can significantly impact their daily life, work and relationships.



Common Symptoms

Symptoms of SAD typically include:



A marked and persistent fear of one or more social situations where the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others (e.g., starting conversations, giving a speech, being seen in public).



Individuals fear that they will behave in a way or show anxiety symptoms that will be negatively viewed, leading to avoidance of social situations whenever possible.



The fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual threat posed by the social situation.



Experience of physical symptoms in social situations (e.g., sweating, trembling, rapid heart rate, etc.)



The fear, anxiety or avoidance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

Manifestation of SAD and the focus of the worry may vary from person to person. It is crucial to consult a mental health professional for an accurate diagnosis.

Causes and Risk Factors

A combination of factors can contribute to or heighten the risk of developing social anxiety disorder. These include:

Genetic Factors

A family history of social anxiety disorder may increase the likelihood of developing the condition.



Neurochemical Imbalances

Changes in brain chemicals like serotonin.



Environmental Factors

High-stress environments, overprotective parenting styles, and/or a lack of appropriate models for social behaviours.



Psychological Factors

Past traumatic experiences, negative self-beliefs, and a history of bullying or social rejection.



Consulting a mental health professional can help in understanding the specific factors that may be influencing an individual's experience of social anxiety disorder.

Treatment Approaches for SAD

SAD can be effectively managed through various treatment approaches including:

Psychotherapy

- Psychotherapy is a collaborative process where a psychologist works with individuals in finding ways to improve their well-being.
- It involves talking with a trained psychologist in a safe and confidential setting.



Medications

- Medications can be effective in reducing anxiety symptoms. They are usually prescribed by a psychiatrist.
- It is important to note that medication also has possible side effects, hence it is important to discuss any concerns you have regarding medication with your healthcare provider.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about SAD

Is SAD the same as shyness?

SAD is not the same as shyness. While shyness is a common personality trait characterised by discomfort or hesitation in social situations, SAD is a clinically recognised mental health condition. SAD involves an intense and irrational fear of social situations, often leading to avoidance behaviours.

Unlike shyness, SAD can significantly impact a person's daily life, relationships, and overall well-being. It is important to seek professional help if you suspect you have SAD, as effective treatments are available. It is strongly recommended that you do not struggle to manage the condition on your own, but reach out for professional help, so that strategies and techniques may be customised to your specific symptoms.

Keep in mind that progress might occur slowly, and experiencing setbacks is perfectly normal. Maintaining a steady commitment is crucial in conquering SAD. Remember to reach out for assistance from mental health professionals and those close to you as you navigate this journey.

Contributed by Psychology (Allied Health Services)

This brochure is produced for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek the advice of a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health or medical condition.

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