

Anxiety: Normal or Disorder?

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Anxiety is an inevitable part of life in contemporary society. It's important to realize that there are many situations that come up in everyday life in which it is *appropriate* and *reasonable* to react with some anxiety. If you didn't feel *any* anxiety in response to everyday challenges involving potential loss or failure, something would be wrong. This workbook can be of use to anyone experiencing normal, ordinary anxiety reactions (everyone, in other words). It is also intended for those of you who are dealing with specific anxiety disorders. Incorporating exercise, breathing skills, relaxation, and good nutritional habits into your daily life--as well as paying attention to self-talk, mistaken beliefs, feelings, assertiveness, and self-esteem--can all contribute to making your life more balanced and less anxious, regardless of the nature and extent of the anxiety you happen to be dealing with.

Anxiety disorders are distinguished from every day, normal anxiety in that they involve anxiety that 1) *is more intense* (for example, panic attacks), 2) *lasts longer* (anxiety that may persist for months instead of going away after a stressful situation has passed), or 3) *leads to phobias* that interfere with your life.

Criteria for diagnosing specific anxiety disorders have been established by the American Psychiatric Association and are listed in a well-known diagnostic manual used by mental health professionals. This manual is called the *DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* fourth edition). The following descriptions of various anxiety disorders are based on the criteria in the *DSM-IV*, as is the self-diagnosis questionnaire at the end of this chapter. This workbook can help you even if your specific anxiety disorder or reaction doesn't fit any of the *DSM-IV*'s diagnostic categories. On the other hand, don't be unduly concerned if your reaction is perfectly described by one of the diagnostic categories. Approximately 15 percent of the people in the United States would find themselves in your company.