

Social Anxiety Disorder

Social Anxiety Disorder, also known as Social Phobia, is an anxiety disorder. People with Social Anxiety experience intense fear of being negatively judged, evaluated, or embarrassed in public. It is more than just shyness. Social Anxiety has negative effects on a person's ability to do well in their career, at school, or in relationships.

People who are extremely shy, self-conscious, and sensitive to criticism are at risk for developing Social Anxiety. Social Anxiety is more common for adolescents but can be treated at any age.

Prevalence

Social Anxiety Disorder affects over 3% of Canadians. Around 8% of people experience symptoms of a social phobia at some time, 11% of Canadians will experience an anxiety disorder, with around 3% developing Social Anxiety Disorder. Social phobias often start before the age of 18 and are reported more often by females.

Symptoms

Symptoms of Social Anxiety include:

- Fear of saying or doing the wrong thing in public
- Physical signs of anxiety like stomach aches, shallow breathing, tense muscles, feeling shaky, heart racing, hot flashes, and blushing.
- Avoiding social situations (this tends to interfere with life or goals)

Treatments that Work

Psychotherapy

Psychologists use several psychotherapy treatments including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to help increase confidence in social situations. These include skills training for social situations and handling strong emotional reactions and are helpful for interacting with people and maintaining personal relationships.

Exposure / Desensitization

This effective psychological treatment supports small, planned steps towards social situation goals that gradually decrease fear and overwhelming emotional responses to feared situations.

Medication

In combination with psychotherapy, physicians can assess for anti-anxiety/antidepressant medications that support anxious reactions.

Self Help

Good self-care makes a real difference. This includes maintaining a healthy lifestyle, managing stress, and healthy coping strategies like controlling alcohol and drug use.

Resources -- [Self help strategies for social anxiety](#), Anxiety Canada

References – Canadian Mental Health Association: [Social Anxiety Disorder](#)

Canadian Mental Health Association BC: [Social Anxiety Disorder](#)