

Common Signs of Social Anxiety ^[1]

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In our previous article, we've explored the nature of healthy and unhealthy anxiety. In a nutshell, social anxiety is an excessive fear triggered by the impression that others will judge and shame you. Most of us choose to avoid such situations in order to relieve ourselves of the intense pressure caused by anxiety. What we don't understand is that this strategy is actually doing more harm than good.

Avoiding is not a good strategy for many reasons. First of all, it's only a matter of time before we have to face a social situation once again. Second, by avoiding social contexts, we lose valuable networking opportunities. In order to live happy and successful, we need the help of others and social anxiety can be a major roadblock. Here's how some of the most common signs of social anxiety can affect our day-to-day lives.

Self-Consciousness

Being extremely preoccupied with your image is one of the basic characteristics of socially anxious individuals. You're constantly worried that people will evaluate you, so you jump through hoops for their approval. Being overly concerned about how others see you will completely drain your energy. You spend countless hours working on your self-image, and you're still not satisfied with the result. Some people are self-conscious about their weight or physical appearance, while others are worried about their mental abilities. Does this sound familiar? "I don't go to the pool because I'm fat and people will laugh at me" or "I won't answer the teacher's question because I might be wrong and he'll think that I'm stupid". These are some typical anxiety-related thoughts.

Fear of Humiliation

One of the biggest fears of socially anxious individuals is that they will be publicly humiliated. If you struggle with social anxiety, being laughed at feels like the end of the world. You don't want people to notice your imperfections because you think that they'll laugh at you. When you're out in public, you feel like everyone is looking at you. Slowly, you decide to step back and enjoy the comfort and safety of your home.

Watch Out for Social Isolation!

Avoidance and social isolation are some of the worst consequences of social anxiety.

Humans are social creatures which were able to evolve and adapt mostly through collaboration. In our complex, fast-growing society, being an island is completely counterproductive.

Sweating, Trembling, and Blushing

Besides the symptoms mentioned above, social anxiety is also accompanied by an entire array of physical symptoms. The most common ones are sweating, blushing and trembling. This usually happens when you're in a social context like for example: public speeches, parties, meetings or even shopping at the local store. You pick up a box of cereals and you suddenly drop it because your hands are shaking. This event draws the attention of other people which makes you sweat and blush intensely.

Do Symptoms Influence Each Other?

What we're trying to say is that one symptom triggers another and you can even end up having a panic attack. The main reason why these symptoms appear is because you're too focused on yourself.

Staying Quiet and Hiding in a Corner

Whenever you go to a party, it's always easy to spot the anxious ones. They're usually somewhere in the corner of the room, leaning against the wall and desperately avoiding eye contact by checking their phones every minute. If you're dealing with social anxiety, being noticed by someone is an absolute nightmare. You simply don't want to attract attention. In some cases, the symptoms might be so severe that you won't even have the nerves to attend a party. As we mentioned earlier, not being able to socialize and interact with other people can be a huge drawback. You miss out on valuable networking opportunities that might be beneficial on a personal and professional level.

Soothing Your Nerves with Alcohol or Other Substances

For hundreds of years, people have been using alcohol as a 'treatment' or 'solution' to their problems. It's not uncommon for anxious people to have a couple of drinks just to 'take the edge off'. By acting as a sedative, alcohol takes your mind off of troubles and puts you in a good mood. Besides alcohol, many anxious individuals also use psychotropic substances like marijuana, ecstasy or amphetamines. The effects of these substances are similar to anti-anxiety medication. Just like avoidance, this strategy is only a short-term solution. Unfortunately, using substances to cope with your social anxiety leads to disastrous endings.

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