

Tip Sheet: Understanding Social Anxiety

Are you afraid of being judged by others or of being embarrassed all the time? Do you often feel extremely fearful and unsure around other people? Do these worries make it hard for you to do everyday tasks like run errands, or talk to people at work or school? If so, you may have a type of anxiety disorder called social phobia, also called social anxiety disorder.

Social phobia is a strong fear of being watched or judged by others and of being embarrassed. This fear can be so strong that it gets in the way of going to work or school or doing other everyday activities. Everyone has felt anxious or embarrassed at one time or another. For example, meeting new people or giving a public speech can make anyone nervous. But people with social phobia worry about these and other things for weeks before they happen.

People with social anxiety disorder fear doing common things in front of others. For example, they might be afraid to sign a check in front of a cashier at the grocery store, or they might be afraid to eat or drink in front of other people or use a public restroom. Most people with social phobia know they shouldn't be as afraid as they are, but they can't control their fear. Sometimes, they end up staying away from places or events where they think they might have to do something that will embarrass them. For some people, social phobia is a problem only in certain situations, while others have symptoms in almost any social environment.

Social phobia usually starts during youth. A doctor can tell that a person has social phobia if the person has had symptoms for at least 6 months. Without treatment, social phobia can last for many years or a lifetime.

People with social phobia tend to:

- Be very anxious about being with other people and have a hard time talking to them, even though they wish that they could
- Be very self-conscious in front of other people and feel embarrassed
- Be very afraid that others will judge them
- Worry for days or weeks before a social event or stay away from places where there are other people
- Have difficulty making friends and keeping friends
- Blush, sweat, tremble, feel nauseous or sick to their stomach when around other people

How is social phobia treated? First, talk to your doctor about your symptoms. Your doctor should do an exam to make sure that another physical problem isn't causing your symptoms. The doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist. Social phobia is generally treated with psychotherapy, medication or both.

Source: Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research

Find more information at www.1in5.info