



About The Initiative

The Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA)—the only national, non-profit membership organization solely dedicated to promoting the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety disorders—launched the ADAA Women's Initiative in May 2003 to reach out to women of all ages and their families to educate them about anxiety disorders and to encourage them to talk to a health professional if they're experiencing anxiety disorder symptoms. Anxiety disorders are real, serious, and treatable conditions that can be effectively treated if diagnosed.

Once a girl reaches puberty, her chances of developing an anxiety disorder double. This increased risk continues for another 35-40 years, a lifetime risk longer than that of almost any other psychiatric or physical illness. These gender differences can range from the age of onset and symptom patterns to treatment responses. Although progress is being made, little is known as to why women are more vulnerable to anxiety disorders. Researchers are currently investigating the role of the following factors in these gender differences:

- Brain chemistry
- Hormones
- Gender roles
- Genetics
- Trauma
- Social support
- Socioeconomic status

The facts remain...

- Women are twice as likely to develop posttraumatic stress disorder after a traumatic event. The risk is even higher after a rape (49 percent for women vs. 0 percent for men), sexual assault other than rape (24 percent for women vs. 16 percent for men), mugging (17 percent for women vs. 2 percent for men), and after being attacked (56 percent vs. 6 percent for men).
- Women are twice as likely to have panic disorder. According to *Harvard Health Watch*, two to three million women frequently experience panic attacks.

Panic disorder is often mentioned as a top reason for women dropping out of college.

- Women are three times more likely than men to be diagnosed with agoraphobia, according to *Harvard Health Watch*.
- Women are twice as likely to experience social phobias and generalized anxiety disorders.

Definitions:

- **Posttraumatic stress disorder** is a condition that results from experiencing or witnessing an unusually distressing event.
- **Panic disorder** is a condition marked by severe and unexpected panic attacks that may resemble feelings of having a heart attack or losing control for no apparent reason.
- **Agoraphobia** is the fear of public places or open spaces.
- **Social phobia** is the intense anxiety of being judged by others and/or publicly behaving in a way that could lead to embarrassment or ridicule.
- **Generalized anxiety disorder** is excessive or unrealistic worry that is unrelated to another illness, lasting six months or more.

While this increased prevalence is still being studied, the effects of anxiety disorders on a woman's life and health are known. Anxiety disorders are real, serious, and treatable. Yet only about one-third of those suffering receive treatment. According to an National Institute of Mental Health-sponsored study, more than 70 percent of mothers bringing a child to a health professional for mental health treatment had untreated depressive and anxiety disorders as well.

To date, the ADAA Women's Initiative has created special materials for college-age women, adult women, and women over the age of 50 that provide information on anxiety disorders, self-tests, finding a provider and self-help groups, treatment options, and questions to ask a therapist. Visit the ADAA's Women's Initiative section on www.adaa.org or call 1-800-922-8947 for more information.