

What is Social Anxiety:

Social anxiety describes feelings of anxiety or fear that occur in response to social situations. In social anxiety, these feelings can be so overwhelming that it's difficult. These overwhelming emotions can occur even when just thinking about a situation or remembering a past event.

“Social anxiety is an intense, persistent fear of being watched and judged by others.”
“Doing everyday things may cause anxiety or fear due to concerns about being humiliated, judged, and rejected.”

People with social anxiety over-analyze or replay social interactions in their mind.

Social anxiety is an “overwhelming fear of:

- Being judged or watched by others in social situations
- Being embarrassed or humiliated
- Accidentally offending someone
- Being the center of attention”

What does social anxiety feel like:

- Being extremely self-conscious in social situations
- A constant, intense, chronic fear of being judged
- Uncomfortable when being watched (giving a presentation, talking a group)
- Hesitation to talk to others
- The need to avoid eye contact

Social anxiety prevents from living a “normal” life, avoiding situations that people wouldn't be nervous about. It can potentially also lead to low self-esteem, depression, sensitivity to criticism, and poor social skills without improvement.

Fight or flight. Literally. Your body responds to it as an emergency situation

What to do about it:

- cognitive-behavioral strategies - address and try to change the habits that develop as a response to social anxiety or fear
- [Breathing retraining](#)
- [Muscle relaxation](#)
- [Practice avoiding safety behaviors](#)
 - This could possibly be an interactive by helping the user figure out their goals
 - Remind user to reward themselves for taking these steps

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is commonly used to treat social anxiety disorder. CBT teaches different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to help combat social anxiety. It can also teach social skills.

A method in CBT called Exposure therapy is progressively confronting the fears to combat avoiding activities one is anxious about.

Another help for social anxiety disorder is acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). It's different from CBT because it uses mindfulness and goal-setting to reduce anxiety.

Medication may also be prescribed to help social anxiety disorder, such as antidepressants, beta-blockers, and anti-anxiety medications. But usually, people with social anxiety disorder have the best results using medication combined with CBT or other psychotherapies.

Support groups can also be very beneficial for social anxiety disorder. You can learn and work together about how social anxiety disorder manifests and how to overcome the anxiety that comes with social situations. It is also comforting to know that you are not the only one who has these same thoughts, feelings, and struggles.

Physical Symptoms:

These symptoms will occur when you are in particular social situations or thinking about them.

- Heart palpitations, racing or pounding heart
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Shortness of breath or a choking feeling
- Chest pain or chest tightness
- Nausea
- Lightheaded or dizzy
- Chills or hot flashes
- Numbness or tingling
- Blushing
- Dry throat or mouth

Social Skills

- reference resources to [improve social skills](#)

Exercise Notes

1. Describe the situation when you had anxiety
 - a. Your thoughts
 - b. Your emotions
 - c. Physical reactions
 - d. What did you do
2. unhelpful thinking
 - Assume what other people are thinking
 - labeling yourself in a negative way
 - Predicting the future and spending a lot of time on it (predicting what will go wrong instead of just waiting to see what will happen)
 - Blame themselves for no logical reason
 - Over-generalizing - assuming all future events will follow a similar pattern
 - Focusing on the negative of past situations
3. Write down unhelpful thoughts
 - Write about the example situation, your feelings and physical reactions thinking about the situation, and your unhelpful thoughts about the situation
4. Challenge unhelpful thoughts
 - Is there any evidence against the thought
 - Is there any evidence for the thought
 - Identify an unhelpful thinking pattern
 - What would you say to a friend with a similar thought
 - Find a different way to look at the situation
 - Is there a proactive solution to the unhelpful thought

Try visualizing potential positives of the situation. Instead of ruminating about the possible negatives, make up positive scenarios. This will also help your head see social events as positives rather than negatives.

Additionally, try to focus on the situation rather than yourself. If you focus on your anxiety symptoms it might worsen them. Focus on the other person or the physical situation you're in (ex. I am in a classroom trying to learn, I can get things wrong because I am learning).

Post social situation activity

See if they engaged in safety behaviors?

Acknowledge the anxious thinking they had, ask to see if it became true

Safety Behaviors

When dealing with fear-inducing social situations, some people use subtle avoiding strategies, or safety behaviors, to make themselves feel safer. Examples of safety behaviors are:

- Removing themselves from the situation (ex. Using the bathroom, finding a task to look busy, sitting away from a group)
- Hiding signs of anxiety (ex. Wearing makeup to hide blushing)
- Using alcohol or drugs (ex. Drinking in social situations)
- Distracting themselves (ex. Zoning out)
- Avoiding sharing personal information (ex. Keeping the conversation on other topics, changing the subject, asking the other person many questions to avoid focus on themselves)
- Avoid drawing attention to themselves (ex. Avoiding eye contact or smiling, speaking quietly, not saying much)
- Overcompensating (ex. Rehearsing what you will say ahead of time, over-preparing for presentations)

It's important to realize that these behaviors are not necessarily keeping you safe, and preventing you from realizing the situation isn't dangerous by not exposing yourself.

Artist statement: (850 characters max)

Katagelo is a one-page informational website about social anxiety disorder. It also includes an online exercise that utilizes Cognitive Behavioral Thinking strategies to help users navigate their anxious thinking.

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