



### tip Why do people get social anxiety?

Doctors don't know exactly what causes this disorder. But, the following may play a part:

- Genetic factors — social anxiety disorder can run in families
- A chemical imbalance in the brain
- A traumatic event or the way a person was raised

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## Mind matters

Current Article

### Social anxiety disorder: Beyond shy

Donny Osmond knew something was seriously wrong the night he froze onstage. In 1994, he was starring in the hit musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. He couldn't recall lines he'd memorized and sung hundreds of times — and it was all he could do not to pass out.



Although he didn't know it at the time, Osmond had social anxiety disorder. It followed him offstage, too. He became terrified of going anywhere in public.

"Once the fear...grabbed me, I couldn't get loose. I felt powerless to think or reason my way out of the panic," Osmond writes in his book, *Life Is Just What You Make It*.

Far different from the butterflies people get before giving a speech or going out on a date, social anxiety disorder causes people to feel extremely embarrassed around others. The fear can be so overpowering that it gets in the way of work, school and other everyday activities. A person with this disorder may avoid public situations altogether. The good news: Effective treatment is available.

### Dodging the spotlight

An estimated 15 million Americans have social anxiety disorder. It usually starts in childhood or the teen years, and it's more common in women than in men. People with this condition:

- Feel very self-conscious in front of other people
- Are afraid that people will judge them
- Worry for days or weeks before going to a public event
- Stay away from places where people are
- Have a hard time making and keeping friends

Some people also have physical symptoms such as:

- Blushing
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Trembling
- A difficult time talking

### Getting help

"I've talked with so many people who were unwilling to do anything about their anxiety disorder because they were too embarrassed," says Osmond. For this reason, many people may go undiagnosed. Some may turn to alcohol or illegal drugs in an attempt to self-treat. But, real treatment begins when you talk with a doctor.

He or she may recommend medicine and seeing a counselor. During therapy, a person may:

- Find ways to control anxiety, such as deep breathing
- Discover ways to change thinking patterns and new ways to react in situations that cause anxiety
- Learn to gradually enter and get used to situations that cause fear

With treatment, Osmond has been able to manage his disorder and move on with his life and career. "I want to let people know that they're not alone and that help is available," he says.

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