Social anxiety in one page

What it is

What is social anxiety?

Social anxiety is a strong, lasting fear of being judged or embarrassed in everyday situations, like eating or speaking in front of others. It is more than shyness. It often starts in childhood, it is common, and it can be treated.

- Social anxiety is a fear of being judged by others

The signs

What are the symptoms of social anxiety?

Social anxiety symptoms include dreading or avoiding social events, feeling watched and self-conscious, and replaying conversations afterwards. Your body may blush, sweat, tremble or race. For a diagnosis, the symptoms have caused distress for at least 6 months.

How a diagnosis happens

How do I get help for social anxiety?

Start with your GP, who can assess you and refer you on. Most people wait a long time: social anxiety usually begins around age 13, and in Australia the median delay before anyone gets help is about 13 years. You do not have to wait that long. Effective treatment exists, and Medicare-subsidised psychology is one way in.

Treatment

Does therapy work for social anxiety?

Yes. Psychological therapy for social anxiety disorder outperforms doing nothing, with about one in two people treated getting a benefit compared with someone on a wait-list. Compared with a credible placebo therapy, the advantage is smaller but still real. CBT built specifically for social anxiety has the strongest results, and benefits mostly hold up months later.

Medication

Do I need medication for social anxiety?

Medication is not the only evidence-based option: CBT and antidepressants such as SSRIs both have strong evidence behind them for social anxiety. If you do try medication, it usually takes about 12 weeks to show its clearest effect, and people who respond are often advised to continue for 12 to 24 months. The choice is made with a doctor.

- CBT and medication both have strong evidence
- The choice is made with a doctor
- SSRIs are usually tried first

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Can my GP prescribe for social anxiety?

Yes. Your GP can prescribe sertraline, escitalopram, venlafaxine and paroxetine. They are Schedule 4 medicines, so any prescriber allowed by state or territory law can write the script, and none of them is Schedule 8. You do not need a psychiatrist to get a script. What drives the paperwork is the PBS subsidy, not who prescribes.

- A GP can prescribe all four medicines
- They are Schedule 4, not Schedule 8
- The PBS subsidy drives the paperwork

What it costs

What does a psychologist cost?

Seeing a psychologist usually means two costs: your GP visit to get a Mental Health Treatment Plan, and the psychologist's own fee. Medicare's Better Access scheme gives a rebate toward up to 10 individual sessions a year, but psychologists set their own fees, so the gap you pay out of pocket varies a lot. Ask the practice about the total cost before you book.

- Two costs: the GP visit and the psychologist
- Medicare rebates part of the psychologist fee

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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