

Living in Fear: Anxiety Disorders

Most people experience brief moments of fear just before a public speaking engagement or a first date. However, for 40 million adults suffering from anxiety disorders, feelings of fear and dread disrupt their lives for at least six months.

“Anxiety disorders impair social and occupational functioning,” explains The Kansas Association of Osteopathic Medicine (KAOM). “Since it is not uncommon for anxiety disorders to occur in people who have pre-existing mental or physical illnesses, physicians will first rule out any medical causes for anxiety symptoms. Then, the treatment can focus on the underlying cause of the anxiety.”

While many different anxiety disorders exist, KAOM says that the most common are:

- Specific phobias;
- Social anxiety disorder;
- Post-traumatic stress disorder; and
- Generalized anxiety disorder, or GAD.

Other disorders such as panic disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder occur less frequently but can cause considerable impairments.

Specific phobias are the most common forms of anxiety disorder and involve intense fear over particular situations or things like spiders, heights or thunderstorms.

Social anxiety disorder is characterized by the fear of being judged negatively in social settings. The severe fear often causes the person to avoid social situations, which can significantly restrict his or her life.

“Patients with GAD suffer from constant, uncontrollable worry about daily events,” explains KAOM. “They can experience anxiety about any situation or thing, from a parking spot to a hurricane.”

Another common anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is the result of experiencing a life-threatening event. PTSD can result from an armed robbery, sexual assault or war experiences. Victims frequently relive the trauma through flash backs or nightmares.

“Treatment options differ for specific phobias, social anxiety, GAD and PTSD,” says KAOM.
“However, most anxiety disorders are treated with medication, psychotherapy or both.”

KAOM further explains that physicians develop a treatment plan for an anxiety disorder based on the physical or mental condition that may be causing the stress and the patient’s personal preferences.

A physician may ask the patient about his or her medical and psychiatric history, perform a physical examination and order lab tests to determine the best treatment for controlling the disorder.

“If you or someone you love is experiencing symptoms of an anxiety disorder, visit your physician to learn more about specific treatment options,” advises KAOM.

Preventive medicine is just one aspect of care osteopathic physicians (D.O.s) provide. Osteopathic physicians are fully-licensed to prescribe medicine and practice in all specialty areas including surgery. D.O.s are trained to consider the health of the whole person and use their hands to help diagnose and treat their patients.