



10 SIGNS YOUR EMPLOYEE MAY BE SUFFERING FROM AN ANXIETY DISORDER

There are multiple types of anxiety disorders each with its symptoms. The signs provided focus mainly on generalized anxiety disorder.

1. Their body language is often tense and fidgety

One of the most prominent signs of anxiety is lingering muscle tension. Limbs and jaws that ache from constant clenching are a common complaint among people with anxiety disorder, though they may not even realize that they're doing it. This tension can affect all parts of the body, so if you notice your colleague clenching their fist, tapping their feet, or generally being unable to keep still — while in a state of high mental and physical agitation — on more than one occasion, count that as a sign of possible anxiety difficulties.

2. They complain of chest pains or a racing heart

In some particular manifestations of anxiety, including panic attacks, the body goes into adrenalin overload, flooding with hormones to stimulate what's known as a "fight or flight" response. The fight or flight response puts the body in a state of high alert, ready to face threats to its survival or flee blindly to preserve itself (even if the situation isn't life-threatening at all). One aspect of this response is a pounding heart rate as the body attempts to give as much oxygen to its limbs as possible. If your co-worker repeatedly complains of suddenly having their pulse race, especially at a time when they feel very anxious or tense, it could be a sign that they would benefit from professional help.

3. They give off a sense of always being on edge

This is most relevant to people with generalized anxiety disorder. People with generalized anxiety disorder are in a constant state of preparation for threats and emergency panicked responses. Your employee is unlikely to tell you this directly, but they will likely give off subconscious and conscious signs that they're ready to jump at any moment. Whether it's pacing, speaking too fast, reacting sharply to exterior noises or stimuli, or being extremely restless, they're primed for action, even if there's nothing which to react.

4. They voice fears that seem catastrophic or misplaced

The cycle of beliefs that drive anxiety can seem completely confusing to a mind that isn't caught in the same trap. Anxious people often fixate on the worst possible outcome for a situation (unlikely though it may be), and obsess over it, unable to convince themselves of its relative lack of possibility. This is called "catastrophizing," and it can be paralyzing. Anxieties come from a deep place, and they often can't be discussed or dismissed rationally.

5. They sleep poorly

The Psychiatric Times notes that anxiety disorders and insomnia are commonly part and parcel of the same experience: insomnia is one of the criteria that can be used to officially diagnose someone with an anxiety disorder, according to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM), a guide for mental health professionals. The reasoning is pretty obvious: If your colleague is hyped up, alert and on the look-out for threats, or unable to stop the catastrophizing thoughts running around their brain, they're unlikely to be able to relax easily and sleep.

6. They're irritable

We all get snappy occasionally, and obviously, there are a wide variety of reasons that a person might be consistently irritable (and not all people with anxiety disorders are irritable). But since people dealing with untreated anxiety disorders are often experiencing poor sleep, nervousness and repeated floods of adrenalin, some irritability often follows. There are other reasons a person dealing with anxiety might be easily upset, as well, too. Those who suffer from anxiety attacks may be especially irritable due to their struggle to cope with anxious thinking — this kind of hyper-vigilance may cause a short fuse when dealing with people in their space or taking up their attention.

7. They need things done a certain way to retain a feeling of control

Though we may think of this behavior as primarily part of obsessive-compulsive disorder, it can be a part of the rest of the spectrum of anxiety, too. One way anxious people deal with feeling anxiety is to overcompensate by exerting great control over your current environment, including the people around you." Your anxious employee may try to feel like they are always in control and micro-manage — a behavior they engage in not because they're bossy, but because they feel that this is what they must do to avert disaster.

8. They avoid situations that prompt too much worry

The technical term for avoiding something because of its potential to trigger anxiety is "avoidance coping," and is one of the most important factors in anxiety. This tendency is an extension of the anxious person trying to hyper-control their environment, except that the control manifests as avoiding any situation that is perceived to be "dangerous." This tendency might be difficult to spot unless they suffer from social anxiety disorder, in which case their avoidance will be centered around social situations. But if it's other things that make them uncontrollably anxious or just life in general, you may have to look harder to see what they're leaving out of their lives: certain situations, people, activities or things that they feel cause serious worry, and avoid.



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9. They can't be "talked down" easily

If somebody who doesn't have an anxiety disorder is worried, you can rationally discuss their concerns with them and examine their feelings in a logical way. People with anxiety disorders do not have the kind of worries that respond to this approach. There's very little that you, as a co-worker or manager, can do to get them "out" of a spiral of anxious thinking or panic attack. That's because anxiety-based worries are not rational, and therefore can't be rationalized. Treatment of serious anxiety requires therapy. You can help in other ways, from supporting your colleague physically during bad episodes to helping them challenge certain parts of their fears on their own.

10. Difficulty making decisions

People who suffer from anxiety disorder often avoid making decisions out of fear of making a mistake. They tend to play out every scenario and work it to a negative conclusion.

If you would like to learn more:

Below are additional resources that you may find helpful.

www.anxiety.org

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov>

<http://www.apa.org>

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