



## **Social Anxiety**

### **What is it?**

Social anxiety is a marked fear of social or performance situations where there is the potential to be humiliated or scrutinised by others. The fear usually stems from a concern about saying or doing something awkward, or worries about others noticing their anxiety symptoms, such as blushing.

This usually leads to people avoiding these situations or enduring them with significant distress which often affects their ability to do what they would like to in life, e.g. limiting job opportunities, or not being able to attend social gatherings and functions. People suffering from social anxiety usually recognise that their fear is excessive.

Research suggests that people with social anxiety have intense self-awareness. This self-directed attention, which usually involves scanning for social blunders, tends to take their focus away from the social situation, thus making it more difficult to engage in conversations.

People also have a tendency to make negative predictions, such as that others will find them boring or that others will notice their anxiety symptoms (e.g. blushing) and judge them negatively as a result.

### **How common is it?**

According to the 2007 Australian National Survey of Mental Health, it is estimated that 1 in 21 Australians experienced social anxiety in the 12 months before the survey.

Social anxiety often co-occurs with other anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder and substance use disorders. Comorbidities with bipolar disorder and body dysmorphic disorder have also been documented.

### **What can I do about it?**

If you are concerned about your symptoms, particularly if they are affecting your quality of life, we recommend to make an appointment to discuss your concerns with a qualified mental health professional, like a psychiatrist or a psychologist. In some cases, a combined approach of seeing a psychiatrist and a psychologist has been found to be most helpful.

### **Professional Help**

Research suggests that cognitive therapy is a very effective way to treat these symptoms. This typically involves exploring the presence of safety behaviours and how this impacts ongoing learning, developing appropriate behavioural experiments and learning to redirect self directed attention.

Exposure Therapy may also assist which involves gradually confronting the situations that trigger excessive anxiety, thus allowing the body to habituate to these triggers and for you to build up confidence in these situations.

## **Contact Us**

The Lawson Clinic  
748 Pacific Highway  
Gordon NSW 2072  
Phone: (02) 9418 4488  
61 + 2 + 9418 4488