

Overview: Anxiety Disorders

When Chronic Fear and Anxiety Drives Recurring Substance Use

What Are Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety Disorders are conditions characterized by persistent, excessive fear or worry that interferes with daily functioning. Unlike ordinary stress or nervousness, these disorders involve anxiety that doesn't go away, occurs across many situations, and often gets worse over time. For families, watching a loved one struggle with constant dread together with substance use is exhausting.

Understanding Anxiety Disorders

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Chronic, excessive worry about everyday matters that the person finds difficult to control. The worry is persistent, lasting months or years, and often accompanied by physical symptoms.

- Constant worry about relatively ordinary experiences
- Difficulty relaxing, always feeling “on edge” or restless
- Physical symptoms: muscle tension, fatigue, headaches

Social Anxiety Disorder

Intense fear of social situations where the person might be judged, embarrassed, or humiliated. This fear often leads to avoidance of work, school, or social events.

- Extreme fear of meeting new people or speaking up
- Avoidance of parties, work events, or social interaction
- Physical symptoms: blushing, sweating, trembling, nausea

Panic Disorder

Panic Disorder involves recurrent, unexpected panic attacks—sudden episodes of intense fear with physical symptoms like racing heart, shortness of breath, and a sense of impending doom.

- Sudden episodes of terror that peak within minutes and feel like a heart attack or dying
- Persistent worry about when the next attack will occur
- Avoidance of places where panic attacks have happened before



Prevalence:
19.1% of U.S. adults¹

Co-Occurrence:
2-3x more likely to develop a substance use disorder²

Treatment Gap:
43% of people with GAD receive appropriate treatment³

Sources: ¹ Any Anxiety Disorder Statistics, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).
² Anxiety and Substance Use Disorders: A Review (Smith & Book, 2010), PMC.
³ Anxiety Disorders Facts & Statistics, Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)

How Anxiety Disorders Contribute to Relapse

Substances may provide temporary relief from the discomfort of chronic anxiety—but at a cost. The relationship between anxiety and substance use is bidirectional: each makes the other worse over time.

- 1) Substances Exacerbate Anxiety**
Provides short-term relief but causes rebound anxiety during withdrawal, creating dependence.
- 2) Early Recovery Feels Overwhelming**
Without the chemical buffer, anxiety drives relapse.
- 3) Untreated Anxiety Undermines Recovery**
No amount of willpower overcomes neurochemistry.

“Many of our clients express that they live in a constant state of worry, never able to relax. Drinking or substance use is what they’ve found counteracts that feeling. The problem is, that relief was always borrowed against a worse tomorrow.”



Brook McKenzie, LCDC
CEO, Burning Tree Ranch

How Anxiety Disorders Are Identified & Diagnosed

- Assessment during sustained abstinence to distinguish the disorder from withdrawal effects
- Detailed history of anxiety symptoms predating substance use or persisting during sobriety
- Evaluation of avoidance patterns, physical symptoms, and functional impairment

Long-Term Treatment for Anxiety Disorders and Addiction

Anxiety disorders and substance use reinforce each other in a cycle that short-term treatment can't break. Each condition must be treated simultaneously, and recovery requires time for new coping patterns to develop. Our **long-term, progress-based model** provides the extended structure needed to address both conditions.

- 1) Accurate Diagnosis Comes First**
Treatment must separate anxiety from substance-induced symptoms.
- 2) Treating Both Conditions Together**
Effectively addressing anxiety reduces the urge to self-medicate.
- 3) Measuring Progress by Stability, Not Days**
Clients advance when they demonstrate sustained emotional regulation without chemical support.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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