**Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia) – Information for Patients**

**What is social anxiety disorder?** People with social anxiety disorder are fearful or anxious about being in social situations, or settings in which they have to perform in front of people. Their anxiety is so great that it causes them a lot of distress and prevents them from being able to do what they need and want to do in their everyday lives.

**What are some common fears of people with social anxiety disorder?**

Some common fears include speaking in public, performing in front of others, asking questions in groups, meeting or talking with strangers, going to parties, using public restrooms, and being watched doing things (e.g. eating).

**What are the symptoms of social anxiety disorder?**

* Fear of being criticized by others, or that others will say bad things about you
* Avoiding or worrying about conversations, meeting new people, or being watched doing things
* Fear of performing in front of others
* Being very self-conscious or embarrassed around others
* Avoiding eye contact or talking to people
* Blushing, sweating, trembling, or having a racing heartbeat when with other people

**How is social anxiety disorder treated?**

There are two types of treatment for social anxiety disorder: cognitive behavioral therapy and medications. In cognitive behavioral therapy (often called CBT), you see a counselor or a psychologist. This individual will work with you to understand your anxiety and find helpful ways to lessen it. There are also many different medications that can help with social anxiety disorder. The main types of medications used are antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications, but there are other options as well. Both CBT and medications are good options for treating social anxiety disorder, so you can talk to your doctor about which one is best for you.

**How long does treatment last?**

With both CBT and medications, it is recommended that you try the treatment for at least three months because it can take a while before you start feeling better. Both CBT and antidepressant medications may take several weeks before they start working. People who stay on treatment for at least six months are less likely to have their anxiety problems come back. Patients who are considering stopping their medications should talk to their doctors about this because stopping all at once can cause withdrawal.

**What are the side effects of treatment for social anxiety disorder?**

Some general side effects of antidepressants used for treating social anxiety disorder include headache, nausea, insomnia, and a loss of sexual desire. Some anti-anxiety medications (especially a class of medicines called benzodiazepines) cause drowsiness and can be habit-forming. Most people can take these medications without having a problem with side effects, but you should talk to your doctor about any concerns or side effects you have.

**Does treatment for social anxiety work?**

Most individuals with social anxiety disorder who receive CBT or take medications for at least three months notice an improvement in their anxiety levels and their ability to function in social situations.

**Where can I get more information?**

The National Institute of Mental Health (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/social-phobia-social-anxiety-disorder/index.shtml>)

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (<http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/social-anxiety-disorder>)

**How can I make an appointment to see a doctor about anxiety in Contra Costa County?**

For appointments, call Access Mental Health Appointment Line for Contra Costa County: 1-888-678-7277