

# Social Anxiety Disorder and Like Conditions

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# What is social anxiety disorder?

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is a condition that is marked by the presence of disproportionate, potentially debilitating fear that presents when the individual is in a social situation where they feel they may be judged or analyzed in any way.

- It may induce panic attacks, heart palpitations, sweating, and crippling pervasive thoughts
- May present with fear and anxiety prior to a social event in anticipation
- People may become avoidant of people and social situations altogether over time

SAD is best treated with therapy and medications including SSRI's or SNRI's. Some patients may benefit from medications taken prior to triggering events such as propranolol or benzodiazepines.

# Social Anxiety Disorder vs Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

ASD is a condition involving genetic and environmental influence that is usually identified in childhood. It is characterized by impairment of social interaction, communication, and preferred avoidance of social situations much like SAD.

Autism is referred to as a “spectrum” disorder because symptoms can be very different depending on the person. A specific subtype of ASD, formerly called Asperger’s Syndrome, was characterized by significant impairment in social situations and high social anxiety without the classical symptoms of language and cognition impairment. Often referred to as “high functioning” ASD.

Asperger’s ASD can be distinguished from classical SAD by the difficulty with social interaction even on a smaller intimate scale as well as classical ASD findings of repetitive patterns or behaviors, interests, and activities.

# Social Anxiety Disorder vs Personality Disorders

Several personality disorders as well as personality traits may present with symptoms similar to SAD.

People who are inherently shy or reserved may want to avoid social situations, but are not likely to experience any of the debilitating or daily life impairing symptoms.

Several personality disorders present with similar avoidant tendencies, but have important differences. Examples include schizotypal personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder. These conditions are characterized by *voluntary* separation from social situations. Can be associated with paranoia or general preference for solitary activity.

Avoidant personality disorder closely follows patterns of SAD with very similar symptoms. Including desire to participate in social activity, but debilitating fear of actually doing so. The most prominent difference is in their own personal perception. People with SAD will acknowledge that their fears are irrational and unwarranted because there is no reason people should judge them or embarrass them. People with avoidant personality disorder are often of the belief that the sense of inadequacy is accurate and valid.