Social Anxiety Disorder

What is Social Anxiety Disorder?

Social anxiety disorder is characterized by persistent strong fears of being judged by others and of being embarrassed in social situations. This fear can be so strong that individuals with this disorder may stay away from places or events where they think they might do something that will embarrass them, or would remain quiet in social situations to avoid drawing attention to themselves. When around other people, individuals with this disorder would blush, tremble, sweat, feel dizzy, and tend to have palpitations, difficulty breathing, and a hard time talking to others even though they wish they could.

What are the Causes of Social Anxiety Disorder?

There is no single cause of social anxiety disorder, but researchers have identified a number of risk factors :

- *Biological factors*
  Heredity, chemical imbalances of neurotransmitters
- *Psychological factors*
  People who are introverted, passive, perfectionists, or have low self-esteem
- *Environmental factors*
  Negative social experiences which caused embarrassment or humiliation, other stressful events in life such as relationship breakdown and job stress

How do I know if I have Social Anxiety Disorder?

1. A marked and persistent fear of social situations in which you believe you may be judged or act in a way that's embarrassing or humiliating, such as joining a group discussion, dating with a friend, talking to people with authority, and attending parties.
2. You avoid anxiety-producing social situations, or when the situations cannot be avoided, you would remain quiet to avoid drawing attention to yourself, or endure the situations with intense anxiety or distress.
3. You recognize that your anxiety level is out of proportion for the situation and unreasonable.
4. Your avoidance behaviours or anxiety interferes with your daily living, work, and social life, or causes you great distress.

What are the treatments for Social Anxiety Disorder?

1. Drug treatment
   For individuals with severe anxiety symptoms, they can take prescribed medication to alleviate the symptoms.

2. Psychotherapy
   Cognitive-behavioural therapy is an effective treatment for social anxiety disorder. It is designed to help individuals modify their irrational anxiety-provoking thoughts, and confront the anxiety-provoking situations in a gradual manner, with the aim of reducing one's anxiety and expanding one's comfort zone. Initially, individuals will feel uneasy when facing anxiety-provoking situations in therapy, but with repeated exposure anxiety will be reduced gradually.

3. Social Skills Training and Relaxation Exercises
   Through receiving coaching and feedback, observation of role models, and participation in role-plays, the social skills of individuals with social anxiety disorder can be enhanced, which in turn helps enhance their confidence in social situations. Alternatively, individuals can learn relaxation techniques to help reduce their anxiety.

How can I Help Myself Manage Social Anxiety Disorder?

1. Actively seek treatment and participate in the process
2. Maintain a health lifestyle : eat a healthy and balanced diet, exercise regularly and moderately, and cultivate meaningful hobbies
3. Do relaxation exercises regularly
4. Take the first step towards overcoming your social anxiety by making a commitment to face your difficulties courageously