

Avoidant Personality Disorder

KEY POINTS

- Avoidant personality disorder is a condition that causes you to avoid people because you feel inadequate and fear being embarrassed and rejected.
 - This disorder affects the way you relate to others and the way you think about everyday activities. Therapy may help. Medicine may help relieve depression or anxiety.
 - Get emergency care if you have serious thoughts of suicide or harming others.
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What is avoidant personality disorder?

Avoidant personality disorder (APD) is a condition that causes you to avoid people because you feel inadequate and fear being embarrassed and rejected.

What is the cause?

The exact cause of this disorder is not known. Possible causes include:

- The brain makes chemicals that affect thoughts, emotions, and actions. Without the right balance of these chemicals, there may be problems with the way you think, feel, or act. People with this disorder may have too little or too much of some of these chemicals.
- Problems in your family when you were growing up may increase your risk. If you were criticized, rejected, or bullied, you may have learned to feel inadequate and insecure around others. You might have learned to avoid other people to avoid feeling bad.
- Your risk is higher if someone in your family has the disorder.
- Stresses such as abuse, financial problems, or the death of loved ones may cause symptoms in people who have this disorder.

APD usually starts in early adulthood. Both women and men may have this disorder.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Avoiding jobs where you would be around a lot of people
- Avoiding romantic relationships
- Not sharing feelings or letting people get to know you
- Worrying all the time that you will be criticized or rejected
- Seeing yourself as unattractive or not as good as other people

- Not taking risks or trying new activities because you do not want to be embarrassed

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider or a mental health therapist will ask about your symptoms and any drug or alcohol use. Your provider may also:

- Ask about your relationships with family, friends, and coworkers
- Give you a psychological evaluation
- Make sure medicines are not causing or increasing your symptoms

You may have lab tests to rule out medical problems.

How is it treated?

This disorder changes the way you relate to others and the way you think about everyday activities. Several types of therapy may help.

- Behavior therapy helps you recognize that the way you act affects others. This can help you change problem behaviors.
- Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is a good way to help you identify and change views you have of yourself, the world, and the future. CBT can make you aware of unhealthy ways of thinking. It can also help you learn new thought and behavior patterns even after you stop going to therapy. It can help you learn to manage stress and improve self-esteem.
- Supportive therapy provides:
 - Encouragement such as hearing that you can do it
 - Positive feedback such as hearing that you are good enough
 - Reassurance such as hearing that you can handle it
- Medicine is not used to treat this disorder but may help if you also have problems with anxiety or depression. Your healthcare provider will work with you to select the best medicine.

How can I take care of myself?

- Get support. Talk with family and friends. Consider joining a support group in your area.
- Learn to manage stress. Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle. Find ways to relax. For example, take up a hobby, listen to music, watch movies, or take walks. Try yoga, meditation, or deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed.
- Take care of your physical health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a variety of healthy foods. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, try to quit. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Stay physically active as advised by your provider.
- Check your medicines. To help prevent problems, tell your healthcare provider and pharmacist about all the medicines, natural remedies, vitamins, and other supplements that you take.

- Contact your healthcare provider or therapist if you have any questions or your symptoms seem to be getting worse.

Get emergency care if you or a loved one has serious thoughts of suicide or harming others.

For more information, contact:

- National Institute of Mental Health
866-615-6464
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>
- Mental Health America
800-969-6642
<https://www.mhanational.org>

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Developed by Change Healthcare.

Published by Change Healthcare.

Produced in Cork, Ireland.