

Anxiety, what is it ?



Fear & Anxiety

Fear occurs in response to a known, external, non-conflictual threat



Anxiety occurs in response to an unknown, internal, vague threat



Both are alerting signals that indicate danger

Normal Anxiety

A healthy emotional and behavioral response that prevents damage in cases where danger is possible

It is typically experienced as a vague, unpleasant sensation that might accompany some bodily symptoms

Some examples:

- running to catch a bus
- studying for an exam
- avoiding a speeding car
- dodging a football
- paying a bill on time



Normal anxiety helps us avoid the threats of daily life.
We need it to survive !

Pathological Anxiety

An excessive emotional and behavioral response, that negatively affects daily life.

It is typically experienced as a persistent sense of nervousness, worry, or indecisiveness that is difficult to control.

For example:

- always assuming the worst outcome
- feeling too panicked to think



Pathological anxiety can cause symptoms that are physical (in the body), and/or psychological (in the mind)

Psychological symptoms of anxiety

- Restlessness
- Feeling keyed up or on edge
- Trouble concentrating
- Mind going “blank”
- Irritability
- Easy fatigue
- Sleep disturbance

Physical symptoms of anxiety

- Shaking
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Stomach upset
- Diarrhea
- Urinary frequency
- Palpitations
- Blurred vision
- Muscle tension

Think of someone who has stage fright !!!

Panic Attacks

A brief episode of intense anxiety and heightened sense of fear
Typically lasting **5-20 minutes**
It may or may not have an identifiable trigger

A panic attack can cause severe chest pain or pressure, that it feels like a heart attack

Many describe it as an “an elephant sitting on my chest”



Common Symptoms of a Panic Attack

- Palpitations, pounding heart, or rapid heart rate
- Sweating, shaking, trembling
- Choking sensation
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea or stomach discomfort
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, feeling faint
- Feelings of unreality (derealization)
- Feeling detached from oneself (depersonalization)
- Fear of losing control or going crazy
- Fear of dying or sense of doom
- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Chills or hot flushes

What helps ?

Reassure yourself

- panic attacks are not dangerous
- it will be over in 30 minutes

Distract yourself

- Deep breathing
- Grounding techniques
- Counting backwards

Allow the symptoms to pass

Helpful Strategies for Anxiety & Panic

Tips for immediate relief (short term)

Grounding Techniques

Five senses exercise	A simple and powerful tool to use when you begin to feel overwhelmed	Count 5, 4, 3,2,1 and list <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 things I see • 4 things I touch • 3 things I hear • 2 things I smell • 1 thing I taste This brings you back to the here and now, and helps you separate yourself from catastrophic thoughts
Breathing Exercises	Breathe deeply with intention	Inhale to a count of five and exhale to a count of five
Progressive muscle relaxation exercises	A deep relaxation technique known to reduce stress, anxiety, and pain	Slowly tighten & then relax one muscle group followed by the next. For example start with the feet, then calves, abdomen, arms, neck, and face.
Cold Exposure	Evidence shows this can calm the nervous system & reduce heart rate.	Touch something cold like an ice pack or dip your face in cold water. Better yet, take a daily cold shower.
Rationalization strategies	Put your thoughts in perspective	Ask yourself: Is this thought true? Is it reasonable? Is it helpful?

Finally, any physical activity can do the trick. Try to go for a walk outside. Alternatively, you can jog in place, walk around your indoor space, or do a household chore. This will help distract you from anxious thoughts and release endorphins in your system to boost your mood.



Tips for overall anxiety reduction (long term)

Evidence supports regularly engaging in any of the following:

- Psychotherapy
- Hypnotherapy
- Yoga & Mindfulness practices

How do I know my panic attack is not cardiac?

Heart attacks and panic attacks are different in quality, duration, and triggers.

	Panic Attack	Heart Attack
Duration	Less than 30 minutes	Few minutes to several hours
Quality	Sharp shooting pains	Crushing chest pressure or tightness
Triggers	Emotional or psychological distress	At rest or on exertion

Panic attacks should improve with any of the strategies meant to reduce panic, such as distraction.

A heart attack will not go away with distraction!

A heart attack is a medical emergency. If you have a cardiac history or suspect a heart attack, seek medical attention immediately.

