



Anxiety and Panic Attacks

MU Patient Education Series

Definition:

Anxiety is our body's typical response to the normal stresses and annoyances of daily life. Usually, anxiety causes a mild reaction, and then we can move on with life. In more severe cases, anxiety can arise from irrational fears or situations and can cause emotions and behaviors that interfere with day-to-day activities.

CAUSES:

Anxiety is a multisystem response to a perceived threat or danger that can occur from any number of factors. Stress caused by work, school or friends can lead to anxiety. A big test can cause anxiety. Waiting for hospital lab results can cause anxiety. Simple stresses on top of these larger stress factors can also make anxiety worse. It is important to try to limit your stress level at all times. Heavy stress is not good for anybody! In addition to personal issues, there are medical factors that can also be linked to anxiety. Factors such as heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse and asthma have been associated with anxiety.

SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

Anxiety expresses itself in a variety of different ways. Symptoms range from a racing heart to a dry mouth. Since we all can get a little anxious, it is essential that you are able to distinguish between normal, daily stresses and full-blown anxiety attacks. Some symptoms of anxiety include:

- Dizziness
- Dry mouth
- Shakiness
- Weakness
- Exhaustion
- Trembling
- Sweating
- Increased heart rate



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- A sense of danger
- Feeling apprehensive
- Panic Attacks

A panic attack is a manifestation of anxiety. It has been coined as an attack because it feels as if panic and anxiety are literally “attacking” your body. During a panic attack, you may experience a racing heart, dizziness, shortness of breath, weakness, sweating and an overwhelming sense of fear and horror. You may also experience feelings of doom. These symptoms typically develop over a short period of time – up to 10 minutes.

TREATMENT/CARE:

The main goal in treating anxiety disorders is to identify and eliminate or decrease the stress factors in your life. Whether it is a stressful relationship, a challenging workload or a chronic illness, managing the underlying anxiety-causing factors is essential. You will need to learn how to manage your stress more effectively. Several anxiety treatment methods include:

- Medications such as antidepressants or anti-anxieties
- Therapy
- Staying active
- Avoiding substance abuse
- Getting enough sleep
- Relaxation or meditation
- Maintaining a healthy weight and diet
- Talking about your anxiety with a family member, friend or therapist
- Learning about your disorder and seeing what you can do to improve your situation

Regardless of which treatment method you choose, it is crucial that you follow it consistently. Sticking to your care plan will help you control your anxiety and minimize your stress.

PREVENTION:

Anxiety can be extremely unpredictable. Anxiety attacks can occur at anytime, and sometimes for no apparent reason. Consequently, anxiety is hard to prevent. Below are some preventative measures that can be taken to attempt to avoid anxiety:

- Get help early and fast
- Avoid substance abuse
- Avoid overly stressful situations
- Talk about your stress—do not leave it bottled up
- Learn stress management techniques



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CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF:

It is very important to avoid letting your anxiety control you! You must control your anxiety! If your stress gets to a level you cannot control, be sure to contact your healthcare provider. If you begin to experience chest pain, fainting, severe headaches or an irregular or rapid heartbeat accompanied by your anxiety, call your physician immediately.

DISCLAIMER:

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