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ANXIETY DISORDERS AND PANIC ATTACKS

It is common to feel worried or scared sometimes. But feelings of intense fear or worry can build to unhealthy levels, making it challenging to complete daily tasks. Overwhelming emotions of distress and worry can also be indicative of anxiety disorders or trigger panic attacks. Although both may begin with similar feelings of distress, key differences exist. Understanding the symptoms of anxiety and panic attacks can help you differentiate between the two conditions.

What Are Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety is a common emotion that can be mild or severe. Anxiety is not stress itself but rather a normal reaction to stress or situations where you feel under threat. You may experience small amounts of anxiety in your daily life with slight muscle tightness, sweating, and mild apprehension or doubt. Low levels can motivate you to prepare for events you are anxious about, like practicing a speech or studying for a test.

Generalized anxiety is one of the most common types of anxiety disorders. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) reports that a person has generalized anxiety disorder if they feel excessive worry and apprehension more days than not over six months.

Symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder include:

- Feeling restless, wound up, or on edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Being irritable
- Getting headaches, muscle aches, stomachaches, or unexplained pains
- Having difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Struggling with sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep

What Are Panic Attacks?

Panic attacks are sudden events that can be triggered by specific phobias, like a fear of speaking in public, but they can also occur without warning when there is no real danger. The Cleveland Clinic revealed that as many as [11% of Americans](#) experience a panic attack every year.

Panic attacks generally last less than 30 minutes, but they can be longer. They are characterized by intense fear that triggers a physical response. Due to the severity of the symptoms, individuals who experience a panic attack may believe they're having a heart attack or another serious medical illness. According to the American Psychiatric Association, symptoms of a panic attack include:

- Palpitations, pounding heart, or rapid heart rate
- Trembling or shaking
- Shortness of breath or smothering sensations
- Chest pain
- Feelings of dizziness, lightheadedness, or faintness
- Feeling of choking
- Numbness or tingling
- Chills or hot flashes
- Nausea or abdominal pains
- Feeling of detachment, losing control, or dying

These symptoms can occur alone or in combination.

Recurring panic attacks can take a toll on your mental and physical health. They may also be symptoms of an underlying condition, like a panic disorder or a thyroid condition. If panic attacks become recurrent, it may be a sign of panic disorder. According to the DSM-5, panic disorder is an anxiety disorder based primarily on the occurrence of panic attacks, which are recurrent and often unexpected.

Conclusion

If you have an anxiety disorder or panic attacks, you are not alone. Both of these mental health conditions are common and can be treated, and it is best to seek out help. Your medical health professional can help you overcome the feelings that lead to anxiety and trigger panic attacks. They may recommend therapy, medication or other options as part of your treatment.

Reach out to your health care provider for more information.