

# Anxiety Disorders

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

Anxiety disorders are some of the most common mental disorders encountered alongside depression, mood disorders, ADHD, and learning disorders.

This tutorial will specifically discuss:

1. Overview of Anxiety Disorders
2. Generalized Anxiety Disorder
3. Panic Disorder
4. Agoraphobia
5. Treatment and Coping

## 1. Overview of Anxiety Disorders

**Anxiety disorders** appear in almost 20% of adults. When anxiety is discussed, it is referring to any feelings of nervousness, or worry, or unease within a person.

Anxiety isn't necessarily all bad. In fact, anxiety can be helpful for people to identify things that are particularly important or dangerous. It's almost sort of a mental indicator or clue to the person that they need to pay particular attention to something.

However, an anxiety disorder is a type of disorder where a person feels anxiety, worry, or unease in a pervasive or particularly strong or unnecessary kind of way. In addition, the disorder impairs their life in some form.

Often, people with an anxiety disorder can develop feelings of defensiveness and inferiority, as well as an insecurity towards other people. Many times, they might feel threatened, and they can't necessarily do anything about it. So, you can see how that could impair a person's life in certain ways.

Remember, when we talk about mental disorders, we're referring to extremes of mental functions or behaviors. Therefore, when we discuss anxiety disorders, we don't mean anxiety in its normal form.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** For example, when we say somebody is anxious when they're taking a test, that's normal behavior. It is normal to feel worried when something is particularly important to you.

When a person has a panic attack, though, it's not just that normal feeling of anxiety, but rather it feels as though their life is in physical danger. For example, they may start choking, or it becomes hard for them to breathe. They might have chest pains, feel nauseous, or even lose control of their body and literally drop to the ground.

All of those feelings can last for a period of minutes to hours. You can see how this could be detrimental to a person to an extreme degree.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Anxiety Disorder

A disorder in which people feel worry or unease in a pervasive or particularly strong or unnecessary way, which impairs their life in some way

---

## 2. Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Anxiety disorders can take a lot of different forms. **Generalized anxiety disorder** is a feeling of being anxious or tense without any specific cause. This feeling of anxiety occurs in a person for at least six months in length. Often, though, it can happen for longer periods of time. A person may feel especially jittery or constantly on edge, with accompanying physical symptoms like sweating or rapid heart rate, an upset stomach, dizziness, and trouble concentrating.

Note that generalized anxiety disorders don't involve short, quick periods of increased anxiety; this would be something like a panic disorder, which we will discuss in the next section. Rather, it's characterized by long periods of time where a person has a constant, pervasive feeling of anxiety, and it can vary in its intensity. It can be very intense, or it can be general and sort of in the background with the person for the majority of the time. Even so, you can see how having these feelings could make a person feel very distraught or stressed out as a result.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Generalized Anxiety Disorder

An anxiety disorder where a person has a feeling of being anxious or tense without any specific cause for at least 6 months

---

## 3. Panic Disorder

A **panic disorder**, on the other hand, is when a person has a constant feeling of anxiety, as mentioned before, with frequent periods of especially intense and often unexpected panic or anxiety occurring. This is what we call a panic attack—that short period of time where a person suddenly feels incredibly worried or nervous, almost without any physical control over it, often for no apparent reason.

However, a panic attack can also be because of specific causes, though the intensity is disproportional for those causes.



**EXAMPLE** If someone becomes especially stressed out by something at work, they might have a

panic attack. This, in turn, increases that feeling of anxiety to a degree that is unbalanced. The reaction does not match the situation.

A person having a panic attack can feel like they're having a heart attack, or they might feel like they're actually going to die. This is a very stressful thing for a person to experience. In addition, panic disorder can occur either with or without agoraphobia, which will be discussed in the next section.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Panic Disorder**

An anxiety disorder when a person has a constant feeling of anxiety with frequent periods of intense, unexpected panic; can occur with or without agoraphobia

---

## 4. Agoraphobia

**Agoraphobia** is anxiety or fear of being in an open space or an unfamiliar space where escape is especially difficult. Now, this is different from what we would call social anxiety disorder, which is a fear of being in social situations and interacting with others, although an agoraphobic person would feel anxious in a crowded public place just like a person with social anxiety disorder.

However, an agoraphobic person would also feel very anxious or afraid if they're out in the middle of the woods with no people present. This happens because they're in a situation where they feel exposed, and they aren't sure where they can escape or run to for safety.

Someone who has a panic disorder with agoraphobia may have a panic attack as a result of being out in public, as a result of their agoraphobia. Or, they might be so worried in anticipation of having a panic attack that they stay at home. In other words, their agoraphobia might affect or be affected by their panic disorder. In reality, these two can feed on each other.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Agoraphobia**

Anxiety or fear of being in open spaces or unfamiliar ones where escape is difficult

---

## 5. Treatment and Coping

Panic attacks, panic disorders, and generalized anxiety disorders can be treated with medication like antidepressants. Anxiolytics are drugs that are specifically designed to decrease anxiety and feelings of fear.

Treatment can also include teaching strategies to reduce or cope with the anxiety, which can help people with anxiety disorders to better mentally deal with their general or specific anxieties.



#### SUMMARY

Today's lesson has been a brief **overview of anxiety disorders**. Anxiety disorder refers to any

disorder where a person feels anxiety, worry, or unease, in a pervasive or particularly strong or unnecessary kind of way. **Generalized anxiety** occurs in a person for at least six months in length, while **panic attacks** are short bursts during which the individual may feel as though they are having a heart attack. Panic disorders can occur with or without **agoraphobia**, which is a fear of being in open or unfamiliar spaces where escape is difficult. **Treatment** for anxiety disorders include medication like antidepressants or anxiolytics, or teaching **copied strategies** to manage anxiety.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from sophia author Erick Taggart.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Agoraphobia**

Anxiety or fear of being in open spaces or unfamiliar ones where escape is difficult.

### **Anxiety Disorder**

A disorder in which people feel worry or unease in a pervasive or particularly strong or unnecessary way, which impairs their life in some way.

### **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

An anxiety disorder where a person has a feeling anxious or tense without any specific cause for at least 6 months.

### **Panic Disorder**

An anxiety disorder when a person has a constant feeling of anxiety with frequent periods of intense, unexpected panic; can occur with or without agoraphobia.