

Anxiety Disorders

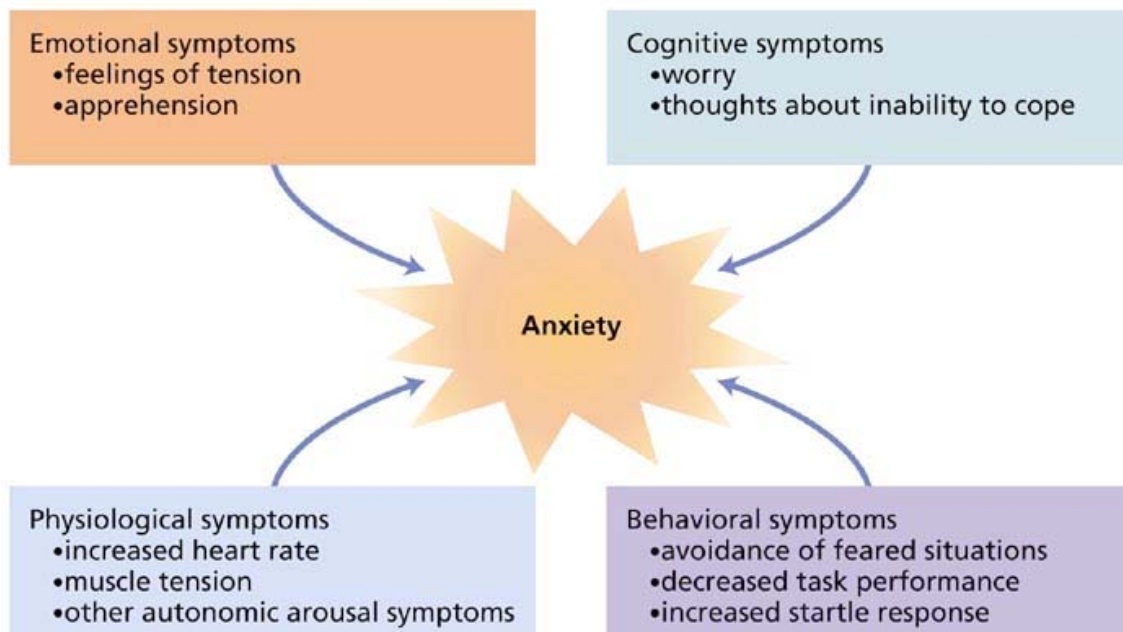
Anxiety: An unpleasant emotional state characterized by physical arousal and feelings of tension, apprehension or worry.

Anxiety is normal. Abnormal anxiety is when it becomes so frequent it interferes with a person's social and professional functioning.

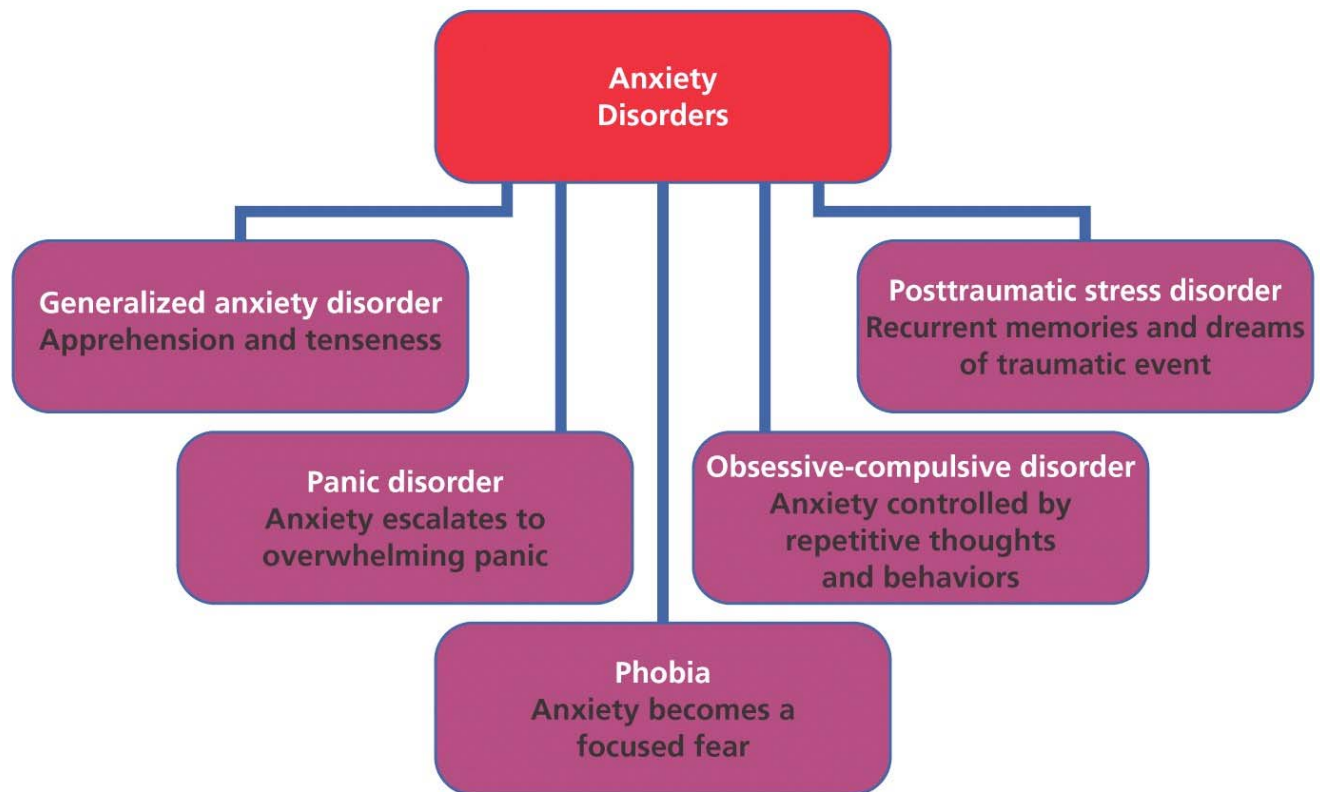


Anxiety disorders: A category of psychological disorders in which extreme anxiety is the main diagnostic feature and causes significant disruptions in the person's cognitive, behavioral, or interpersonal functioning.

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Types of anxiety disorders include:



- General anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Panic Disorder
- Phobias
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Anxiety disorders are the most common category of psychological disorders and account for about 4 million visits to doctors' offices each year in the United States.

Defining characteristics of pathological anxiety

Pathological	Normal
<u>Irrational</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxiety provoked by threats that are exaggerated or non-existent. The response is out of proportion to the actual importance of the situation. It is intense. <p>My sister screams and jumps at the sight of a spider or its picture.</p>	<u>Rational</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxiety provoked by real and reasonable threats. The response is proportional to the actual importance of the situation. <p>My mother pays no attention at the sight of a spider.</p>
<u>Uncontrollable</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The person cannot shut off the alarm reaction even when they know the reaction to the anxiety is unrealistic. Their reactions are more frequent. <p>My sister cannot contain her anxiety, even though she realizes it is "just a spider".</p>	<u>Controllable</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The person can control their reactions to anxiety. <p>I can calmly respond to a spider, even though I don't like spiders either.</p>
<u>Disruptive</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The anxiety interferes with relationships, job, or academic performance. <p>My sister cannot continue working with a spider in the room.</p>	<u>Undisruptive</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The anxiety does not interfere with your relationships, job, or academic performance. <p>I can continue working in the room with a spider.</p>

General Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

General anxiety disorder (GAD) or free-floating anxiety—
An anxiety disorder characterized by excessive, global and persistent symptoms of anxiety occurring more days than not for at least 6 months.

- These people feel anxious about a wide range of life circumstances with little or no *apparent* reason.
- These people expect the worse, their worries are either unfounded or exaggerated and difficult to control
- These people may unduely worry about their finances, their own health or that of family members, performance at work, or their ability to function socially.
- Intense anxiety may cause you to feel tense, tired, irritable, trouble concentrating and problems sleeping.
- Other symptoms may include trembling, palpitations, sweating, dizziness, nausea, diarrhea or frequent urination.
- GAD affects twice as many women as men.
- The heritability estimate is about 30%.

Panic Disorder

Panic disorder—An anxiety disorder in which the person experiences frequent and unexpected *panic attacks*. Unlike GAD, this anxiety occurs in spurts, rather than continuously.

Panic attacks—A sudden episode of extreme anxiety and physiological arousal, fear or terror that rapidly escalates in intensity for no apparent reason.

- People commonly report a pounding heart, uncontrollable trembling or shaking, sensations of choking or smothering. Some believe they are going to die or are “going crazy”.
- The more catastrophic a person’s belief about panic attacks, the more intense the panic attacks.
- Sufferers must cope with both with repeated attacks and with anxiety about occurrence and consequence of future attacks.
- About 2% of men, and 5% of women suffer from panic attacks.
- People who suffer panic attacks have an increase risk of drug and alcohol abuse.

Explaining panic attacks and panic disorders

- Biological: Panic disorders tend to run in families, however patients tend not to have other relatives with panic disorders. Twin studies indicate a higher rate of anxiety disorders than non-twins.
- Psychological: Overreaction to physiological arousal. Eg. caffeine can lead to panic attacks. People prone to panic attacks can misinterpret physical signs of arousal as catastrophic and dangerous. (Think of when you start listening to your car, everything becomes a clue of something wrong). People become conditioned to associate the physiological arousal as a panic attack.

Phobias

Phobias—An irrational fear triggered by a specific object or situation or activity. The fear response is out of proportion to the stimulus and the fear and avoidance must significantly interfere with daily life.

Generally, phobics realize their fears are irrational, but feel compelled to avoid the feared situation or objects.

TABLE 28.2 SOME COMMON—AND NOT-SO-COMMON—
PHOBIAS

These are common:

Blood	hematophobia
Darkness	nyctophobia
Enclosed space	claustrophobia
Germes	spermophobia
Heights	acrophobia
Mice	musophobia
Snakes	ophidiophobia
Spiders	arachanophobia
Wasps	spheksophobia

Phobias can develop to almost anything, including:

Air	aerophobia
Churches	ecclesiaphobia
Eyes	ommatophobia
Frost	cryophobia
Shadows	sciophobia
Swallowing	phagophobia
Trees	dendrophobia

Source: Adapted from Melville, 1978.

Agoraphobia versus Social Phobia

Agoraphobia—the intense fear of being in a situation from which escape is not possible or in which help would not be available if one experience overwhelming anxiety or panic attack is the most common phobia in which people seek help.

- In such cases, a person plans their life around avoiding feared situations such as busy streets, crowded stores, restaurants, and/or public transportation.
- An agoraphobic will often not leave home unless accompanied by a friend or family member.
- Women are 4 times as likely to suffer from agoraphobia as men.
- Agoraphobia typically begins during the early adult years with repeated panic attacks. The intense fear of having another panic causes a person to avoid places or situations where a previous panic attack occurred.

Social phobia—an irrational fear and avoidance of any social or performance situation in which one might embarrass or humiliate oneself in front of others by appearing clumsy, foolish, or incompetent.

Explaining phobias

- Classical conditioning: (eg. being bitten by a poodle, you avoid dogs).
- Operant conditioning (negative reinforcement): You learn avoidance behavior by reducing your anxiety by avoiding a negative situation—dogs.
- Observational learning: You learn to be afraid of dogs by seeing other people responding quite negatively to dogs.
- Evolution/biological preparedness

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—An anxiety disorder in which chronic and persistent symptoms of anxiety develop in response to an extreme physical or psychological trauma.

- The person frequently recalls the event, replaying it in their mind. These recollections are intrusive and interfere with normal thoughts.
- The person avoids stimuli or situations that tend to trigger memories of the experience and undergo a general numbing of emotional responses.
- The person experiences the increased physical arousal associated with anxiety. The person may be easily startled, experiences sleep disturbances, has problems concentrating, and remembering, and prone to irritability or angry outbursts.

Triggers of PTSD:

- Involved in sexual assault
- Involved in a violent crime / terrorist attack / war (whether a victim or bystander)
- Involved in an accident (whether a victim or bystander), such as the bridge collapse in Minnesota, or mine collapse in Utah.
- Survived a catastrophic natural disaster (like Hurricane Katrina)

Post-traumatic syndrome (PTSD)

- The source of the disorder is the traumatic event, rather than the individual
- Individuals with a history of psychological disorders are prone to PTSD

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Obsessive-compulsive disorder: An anxiety disorder in which the symptoms of anxiety are triggered by intrusive, repetitive thoughts and urge to perform certain actions.

- Obsessions: repetitive, intrusive, irrational thoughts that cause great distress. Common worries are about contamination by germs, or performing a certain act (eg. turning off the stove).
- Compulsions: repetitive behavior that reduces anxiety. People do not derive satisfaction from their compulsions. The experience extreme anxiety if they do not engage in a particular behavior.

The obsessions have very little basis in reality. The obsessions are not the same as everyday worries. Normal worries usually have some factual basis, even if exaggerated. True obsessive-compulsive individuals do not find satisfaction in their obsessions or compulsions.

Anxiety Disorders: OCD



About 2-3% of the US population suffers from OCD.

Table 14.3	
The Most Common Obsessions and Compulsions	
Obsession	Description
Contamination	Irrational fear of contamination by dirt, germs, or other toxic substances. Typically accompanied by cleaning or washing compulsion.
Pathological	Feeling of uncertainty about having accomplished a simple task. Recurring fear that you have inadvertently harmed someone or violated a law. Typically accompanied by checking compulsion.
Violent or sexual thoughts	Fear that you have harmed or will harm another person or will engage in some sort of unacceptable sexual behavior. Or the fear that you have done or will do something socially unacceptable. May take the form of intrusive mental images or impulses.
Compulsion	Description
Washing	Urge to repeatedly wash yourself or clean your surroundings. Cleaning or washing may involve an elaborate, lengthy ritual. Often linked with contamination obsession but may also be a compulsive ritual that is intended to prevent some sort of unrelated catastrophe.
Checking	Checking over and over again to make sure that a simple task has been accomplished. Typically occurs in association with pathological doubt. Checking rituals may take hours.
Counting	Need to engage in certain behaviors a specific number of times or to count to a certain number before performing some action or task.
Symmetry and precision	Need to have things or actions be perfectly symmetrical. Need to have objects in an exact order or position. Need to do or undo certain actions in an exact fashion.
SOURCE: Based on Rasmussen & Eisen (1992), Table 1, p. 745.	

Common compulsions involve cleaning and washing behaviors, counting, checking, touching objects, hoarding, and excessive organizing. Cleaning and checking compulsions comprise about 75% of OCD patients receiving treatment.

The behavior becomes a problem when the behavior cannot resist performing it, if it is very time consuming, and if it interferes with the person's normal activities and relations with others.

Explaining obsessive-compulsive disorders

- Genes affecting deficiencies in the neurotransmitter serotonin functioning is suspected of causing OCD in some patients.
- Dysfunctions in the frontal lobes and/or the caudate nucleus.
- Studies have shown that early autoimmune system diseases, early strep infections, and changes in the brain caused by infection may predispose a person to develop OCD.

Summary of Anxiety Disorders

Table 14.4

The Anxiety Disorders

General Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

- Persistent, chronic, unreasonable worry and anxiety
- General symptoms of anxiety, including persistent physical arousal

Panic Disorder

- Frequent and unexpected panic attacks, with no specific or identifiable trigger

Phobias

- Intense anxiety or panic attack triggered by a specific object or situation
- Persistent avoidance of feared object or situation

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Anxiety triggered by memories of a traumatic experience

Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- Anxiety caused by uncontrollable, persistent, recurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or
- Anxiety caused by uncontrollable, persistent urges to perform certain actions (compulsions)

Example of an anxiety disorder

A restaurant worker has a persistent fear that he has inadvertently contaminated the food he is preparing with a poisonous compound. He repeatedly throws out the food and starts from scratch, meticulously writing down every ingredient he adds to the meal.

Likely disorder: obsessive-compulsive disorder (anxiety disorder)

Characteristics of obsessive-compulsive disorder

- Anxiety caused by uncontrollable, persistent, recurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or
- Anxiety caused by uncontrollable urges to perform certain actions (compulsions)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder—An anxiety disorder in which the symptoms of anxiety are triggered by intrusive, repetitive thoughts and urges to perform certain actions. The obsessions have very little basis in reality. The obsessions are not the same as everyday worries. Normal worries usually have some factual basis, even if exaggerated. True obsessive-compulsive individuals do not find satisfaction in their obsessions or compulsions.

Explaining obsessive-compulsive disorders

- Deficiencies in the neurotransmitter serotonin
- Dysfunctions in the frontal lobes and/or the caudate nucleus.

Example of an anxiety disorder

An individual is afraid to leave her house and travel to work because of a fear of experiencing a panic attack on the subway or at the office.

Likely disorder: agoraphobia (anxiety disorder)

Characteristics of agoraphobia

- Anxiety produces by the extreme and irrational fear of experiencing a panic attack in a public situation and being unable to escape or get help.

Agoraphobia: Anxiety produces by the extreme and irrational fear of experiencing a panic attack in a public situation and being unable to escape or get help.