



**ANXIETY  
DISORDERS**

# **PANIC DISORDER**

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## **WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?**

A panic attack is an intense psychological and physical reaction that usually happens suddenly and causes increased heart rate, shortness of breath, chills, hot flashes, trembling, and an impending sense of doom. A person experiencing a panic attack may think they are having a heart attack, are dying, or are losing a sense of reality. Many people may experience at least one panic attack during their lifetime. People who have mental health disorders like depression and anxiety disorders may experience panic attacks frequently.

## **WHAT IS PANIC DISORDER?**

Panic disorder is the experience of unexpected and recurrent panic attacks. A person with panic disorder can experience a panic attack out of the blue, despite not finding themselves in a life-threatening situation. The unpredictable occurrence of panic attacks might lead to the development of anxiety over having another panic attack as well as worry about the physical symptoms experienced and the repercussions on their health.

## **WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF LEFT UNTREATED?**

It is advised to seek treatment for panic disorder to prevent undesirable consequences. For instance, experiencing a panic attack while driving a car may place a person in imminent physical danger. Panic disorder can also precipitate other mental health disorders such as agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces or leaving one's own home, due to the fear of having an unexpected panic attack. Panic disorder can be treated with psychiatrist-prescribed medications and/or psychotherapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy.



**ANXIETY  
DISORDERS**

**GENERALIZED  
ANXIETY  
DISORDER  
(GAD)**

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## WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Productive anxiety is an adaptive worry that pushes a person to better plan and work on improving their performance and the state of their well-being. Productive anxiety can be helpful in activating the behavior of individuals towards a desired goal! However, when anxiety persists for a long duration (at least 6 months) and/or increases in intensity and/or frequency (recurrency), it may become a hindrance rather than an aid. Pathological anxiety can stop a person from performing their daily life activities and can negatively affect performance and well-being.

## WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

A person with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) experiences persistent and excessive anxiety about general and multiple different things (like family, health, income, etc.), activities (meeting with a friend, etc.) and events (school and job performances). The person can experience an inability to rest, agitation, difficulty focusing, problems falling asleep, and physical symptoms like headaches, muscle aches, and fatigue.

## WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF LEFT UNTREATED?

Generalized anxiety is a chronic condition that requires treatment, usually in the form of a combination of medications and psychotherapy like cognitive behavioral therapy. It is not an anxiety about a specific situation but one that affects all aspects of a person's life, preventing them from going about their day-to-day activities in a successful and productive way. If left untreated, a person suffering from generalized anxiety disorder might experience physical health symptoms, difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships, isolation and social avoidance, impairments in their school or job performance, an increased risk of other comorbidities (substance use disorder and depression), and a risk of self-harm and death by suicide.



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# **SPECIFIC PHOBIA**

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## **WHAT IS A SPECIFIC PHOBIA?**

A specific phobia is an intense fear of a certain object or situation. Common specific phobias include fears of flying, heights, blood, needle, animals, and closed spaces. When faced with the specific situation or object, a person will experience symptoms similar to a panic attack (including difficulty breathing, sweating, increased heart rate, nausea, etc.). The person often realizes that their fear is excessive but feels incapable to change or control their reaction. Thus, they start avoiding these objects and situations.

## **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FEAR AND A PHOBIA?**

Fear is a feeling that any given person experiences when facing a dangerous situation. Fear, in response to a threat, is an adaptive reaction that triggers the body's fight or flight system, allowing a person to escape danger. When a person has a specific phobia, excessive and disproportionate fear is experienced in response to a specific object or situation, regardless of actual threat. The response may be extreme, causing a feeling of loss of control over physical and psychological reactions.

## **WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF LEFT UNTREATED?**

Phobias appearing in early childhood age usually disappear over time. However, most phobias appearing later in development are less likely to disappear without any treatment. A specific phobia can considerably affect the person's quality of life especially if the object or situation cannot be easily avoided. Psychotherapies, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and exposure therapy are effective in treating specific phobias.



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# **SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDERS**

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## WHAT IS SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER?

A person with social anxiety disorder or social phobia has an extreme and intense fear of being judged or scrutinized in a social or performance setting. Social anxiety can be particular to a certain social situation like speaking in public or generalized to any situation requiring social interaction, causing the person to actively avoid going out with friends, attending classes, or going to work. The person could feel powerless and drained in these social situations and experience nausea, sweating, and heart pounding which may even lead to panic attacks. The person feels that “all eyes are on me”.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHYNESS AND SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER?

Shyness or self-consciousness are normal experiences when faced with a novel situation or interacting with unfamiliar people. For a person experiencing social anxiety disorder, however, these situations can cause a disproportionate amount of discomfort and negative emotions. The person may be overwhelmed by constant worry about appearing visibly anxious (blushing, having a pounding heartbeat, stumbling over their words, etc.) or being perceived undesirably as someone who is awkward, stupid, or boring. As a result, some individuals may begin to avoid attending social gatherings and important meetings for fear of being judged and scrutinized. Such feelings and thoughts become so persistent and intense that they disrupt the person’s daily life interactions.

## WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF LEFT UNTREATED?

Social anxiety disorder can greatly interfere with many areas of a person’s daily life, including their interpersonal relationships, schooling, and work, due to the individual’s isolation and social withdrawal. Individuals with social anxiety disorder are at increased risk of major depressive disorder and substance use disorders. As with many medical disorders, medication and psychotherapy are effective treatments for social anxiety disorder.