
Differentiating between Anxiety Disorders, Generalized Anxiety Disorders, and Panic Disorders

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Anxiety disorders are the most common disorder in the US (approximately 40 million American adults). Panic disorders are very common (approximately 25% of American adults suffer once in their lifetime).

Anxiety disorders that feature excessive fear and anxiety and related behavioral disturbances. Fear is the emotional response to a perceived imminent threat; Anxiety is the anticipation of a future threat. Anxiety is more often associated with muscle tension and vigilance in preparation for future danger and avoidant behaviors. The reduced anxiety is by avoidance behaviors [1].

Individuals with anxiety disorders overestimate the danger in situations they fear or avoid. Anxiety disorders largely develop in childhood and tend to persist if not treated. It's a 2:1 ratio for women [1].

Generalized Anxiety Disorders impact 6.8 million Americans or 3.1% as per NIMH. Generalized Anxiety Disorder defined as excessive worry most days for 6 months. Three out of 6 symptoms: Restless, fatigue, decreased concentration, irritability, tension, and insomnia. Symptoms interfere with work and social functioning [1].

Panic Disorder impacts 6 million adults or 2.7% of the US population as per NIMH. Panic Disorder is an abrupt surge of intense fear or intense discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes of some of the symptoms [1].

Persistent worry of additional attacks for 1 month. Physical symptoms first then psychological.

Four out of 13 symptoms: Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate.

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Sweating, trembling, or shaking, sensations of shortness of breath, or smothering.

Feelings of choking, Chest pain or discomfort, nausea, or abdominal distress.

Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint, Chills or heat sensations, Paresthesia (numbness or tingling sensations), Derealization or depersonalization. Fear of losing control or “going crazy”, Fear of dying [1].

Elena Welsh (2018) indicated that Panic attacks can occur during a high-stress situation which can be a transition, new promotion, entering school, bereavement, end of life, or break up [2].

Elena Welsh at a PESI seminar indicated that there are variations in the cultural aspect of symptoms. African Americans show high rates of paresthesias and fear of dying. East Asians show high rates of dizziness. Puerto Ricans show high rates of depersonalization. Chest pain or discomfort [2].

Social Anxiety Disorders impact 15 million adults, or 6.1% of the US population as per NIMH. Social anxiety is typically fear of social scrutiny of others. The social situations always provoked anxiety. The anxiety is usually out of proportion to the fear itself.

Grounding techniques can be used for anxiety and stress management.

Breathe deeply. Slowly inhale, then exhale. Think “calm” and “relax”. Savor food or drink. Mindful walking and eating. Hold a piece of ice. Movement. Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method. Five things you hear. Four things you see. Three things you can touch. Two things you can smell. One thing you can taste.

Practice self-kindness by repeating self-compassionate phrases to oneself. Visualize one’s favorite and safe place. Use each of one’s senses, the noises you hear, the objects you see, and the smell. Touch something soothing and comforting. Listen to music. Use your own two or three words to describe your feelings. Process your feelings with someone whom you trust. Distraction is a good way to regulate negative emotions.

Learning to recover takes practice, it will enhance your presence at work, home, and overall psychological well-being.

REFERENCES

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2. Elena W. A Workbook to Help Your Grow, Rebuild, and Take Back Your Life Trauma Survivors’ Strategies for Healing. Texas: Althea Press, USA; 2018.