

Anxiety Disorders and Panic Attacks: Calming the Mind

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Narrator

When someone experiences anxiety or a panic attack, they may feel as if they're losing control, and the world is spinning out of control.

Kelsey, Patient

From the time I was a kid I would be up all night worrying that the nuclear power plant by my house was going to explode or that my house was going to catch on fire, or that it, my parents were going to die. All these really big worries that plagued me.

Kate, Patient

I was having moments where my mind was constantly racing and you don't really notice those things until it gets really bad, so until I started having the panic attacks.

Narrator

Every year, nearly one in five adults are affected by anxiety disorders. More than just mild, temporary uneasiness brought on by stress, anxiety disorders are severe and last for months or years. And it's not unusual for anxiety disorders to occur with other illnesses, such as alcohol or substance abuse.

Rachel C. Leonard, PhD, Behavioral Activation Specialist & Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

So anxiety disorders are a group of disorders where individuals experience excessive fear and anxiety about specific types of triggers. And so some of the anxiety disorders are like generalized anxiety disorder where people are consumed by excessive worry that is kind of too much for the situation, or social anxiety where people have difficulty talking with others or performing in certain situations.

Panic disorder where people have panic attacks that are unexpected. And with kids we'll see a lot of separation anxiety; so difficulty being apart from their parents, and then there are some specific phobias too that people might experience; so like a fear of flying or a fear of spiders, things like that.

Narrator

Other types of anxiety disorders include obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and specific phobias. Each type of anxiety disorder has different symptoms, but all the symptoms cluster around extreme, unreasonable fear and dread. If an anxiety impairs functioning in your daily life, it may be an anxiety disorder.

Kelsey, Patient

My worries interfered with a lot of just my daily activities. When I decided to find support it was because anxiety or worry, or whatever it was, I wasn't sure, it was getting in the way of my relationships. It was getting in the way of my ability to function at school. I felt like I was paralyzed by whatever this was going on in my mind and in my body, and I decided to take the step to see the counselor at my school.

Rachel C. Leonard, PhD, Behavioral Activation Specialist & Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

So there are a variety of treatments out there for anxiety disorders. The two main treatments that we would recommend are Exposure Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and medication treatments. And so with therapy we would encourage people to kind of gradually at a pace that's comfortable to them, confront the different situations or triggers that cause them to feel anxious, and when they tend to get a lot of anxiety people tend to kind of have their lives shrink and really stop doing things that can lead to a meaningful and more satisfied life, and so through that course of treatment we can help them.

Narrator

Effective therapies for anxiety disorders are available, and research is uncovering new treatments to help people with anxiety disorders lead productive, fulfilling lives. But treatments don't always work on the first try. It may take several different treatments or combinations of treatments before finding the best one for you. If you or a loved one has an anxiety disorder, seek information and treatment right away. Here are questions that can help you choose a mental health provider.

- What approaches have worked for your past clients? Look for options rather than a "one size fits all" approach.
- What are my treatment options?
- If medication is an option, what are the possible side effects?
- How will I know we are on the right track for my recovery? Your provider should be willing to be held accountable for the outcomes of treatment they provide.
- What lifestyle changes can I make to help me feel better? You are the author of your own recovery. Providers should base their advice on your strengths, values and lifestyle options.
- How will alcohol or other drugs interact with my medication or affect my anxiety?

Rachel C. Leonard, PhD, Behavioral Activation Specialist & Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

Each patient is unique in their needs, and a good mental health professional will be able to really tailor treatment exactly to that individual and so it's hard to say this is exactly the approach someone would take with you because a good therapist or psychiatrist, or psychologist will be able to really get to know you and make the treatment fit for your needs.

Kate, Patient

My life after being diagnosed with anxiety is a lot better. I can do things on my own. I don't feel like I need company to go out to the store. I can drive on my own without having to get nervous about going over a bridge or going at a certain speed. I'm a lot more calm. I can sleep through the night without having my mind racing a million miles per hour.

Kelsey, Patient

Being diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder felt empowering. I finally had an understanding. I wasn't as confused about what was going on with me, so... My advice for others who are receiving a diagnosis of anxiety or panic disorder is, "Don't freak out. It's going to be okay, and this is a good next step for you." There's a lot of information on anxiety. There's all these evidence-based treatments, and fortunately this diagnosis is one of the most treatable. So receiving that diagnosis, that's a gift.