



UNTANGLING ANXIETY

An ebook on anxiety and anxiety disorders



featuring

THE KNOT

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First Edition

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INTRODUCTION

We've all experienced anxiety, as a knot in our stomach, increased heart rate or sweaty palms. Often it passes, but sometimes it doesn't. This ebook, Untangling Anxiety, explains the science of anxiety; the process in the brain that causes it and why our bodies react to anxiety the way they do. It also elaborates on panic attacks offering resources to calm down. The six most common types of anxiety disorders have been illustrated along with their causes, signs and symptoms.

Untangling Anxiety, uses the knot we experience as a metaphor to stand in for all the different ways in which we experience anxiety and through it we hope to unravel how anxiety affects our minds and bodies.

The ebook aims to equip people with knowledge on anxiety so they can understand its ubiquitous nature and create a community that is friendly to those who suffer from anxiety disorders. Understanding how anxiety works can also greatly help those who suffer from it, because it demystifies the uncomfortable symptoms that one experiences.

This ebook can be useful to anyone who wants to learn about anxiety and anxiety disorders. It can aid caregivers in understanding the condition so they can empathise with their loved ones better. Psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health professionals can use it to explain anxiety and anxiety disorders to their patients.

The ebook was created with help of Bengaluru-based psychiatrists Dr Soumya Hegde and Dr Ashlesha Bagadia.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is how your mind and body help you cope with anything that is stressful, dangerous or unfamiliar.



For example, you are about to go on stage to give a public speech. Your hands start to tremble and your legs feel like jelly. You may have thoughts of fear and being unprepared.

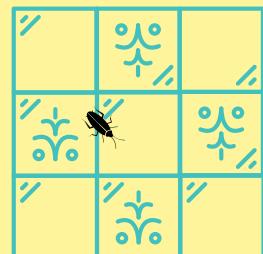
While it may seem strange and uncomfortable, this is your body's way of preparing you to perform the task at hand. This can happen in other situations as well—when you're walking down a dark street by yourself or if you are suddenly lost in an unknown city.

What causes anxiety?

The causes of anxiety are relative and depend on the person who is experiencing them. We address the cause of anxiety as a 'trigger'.

A trigger is an object, concept or circumstance that causes feelings of anxiety, worry, fear or panic.

If you're in your bathroom and you spot a cockroach in a corner, you are likely to feel fear or panic. The trigger is the cockroach's presence. You are afraid the cockroach is going to approach you and the feelings you experience (like the rush of adrenaline) will help you escape the situation and get out of the bathroom without having to deal with the cockroach. In this example, the trigger is real and immediate.

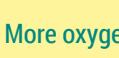
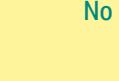
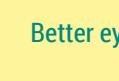
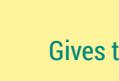
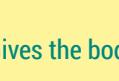
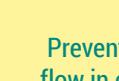


However, a trigger can also be perceived and not immediate—like worrying about the results of a medical test. The trigger isn't the result, but the uncertainty of what it is and how it's going to affect your life. The discomfort is also anticipatory in nature as you fear what is going to happen, and not what is happening at the moment. It is useful because being nervous about the result can help you plan and prepare you for bad news if the result turns out to be unfavorable.

The flight or fight response

Before we built cities and social media sites, humans lived in the jungle and were prey to many of its predators. When a person encountered a tiger in the wild, their body's flight or fight response would get switched on, to help them either escape (flight) or confront (fight).

The amygdala, a tiny almond-shaped part of the brain, senses the danger in the shades of orange and black behind the rustling leaves. It sends the big part of their brain the signal to prepare for a fight or flight—this makes the body release hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol which cause the following reactions to occur in the body:

Reaction	Flight	Fight	Function
 Heart and lung function increases			 More oxygen reaches the brain
 Digestion slows down or stops			 No distractions
 Bladder and sphincter muscles relax			 Better eyesight and focus
 Pupils get dilated  Peripheral vision reduces			 Gives the body energy
 Blood pressure and blood sugar increase			 Gives the body speed and stamina
 Muscle tension increases  Blood flow diverted towards muscles			 Prevents excess blood flow in case of an injury
 Blood clotting function increases			

Every reaction of the fight or flight response has a purpose. For example, even if they were hungry before they encountered the tiger, they will not feel hungry after because the body requires all of the blood flow to go towards the muscles, leaving the digestive system unattended. Also, who wants to start to feel hungry while taking down a tiger?

■■■■■ Anxiety, worry, fear and panic - which word should I use? ■■■■■

In usage, anxiety, worry, fear and panic all describe different degrees of the same emotion.

Anxiety is a feeling brought on by a trigger to help prepare the body to confront a stressful, dangerous or unfamiliar situation. A constant state of anxiety is called worry. When the cause for anxiety or worry becomes immediate or impending, it is known as fear. An extension of fear and its most extreme form is known as panic.

Let's say you've always been nervous about heights—looking over a balcony gives you that pull in your stomach or driving over a flyover makes you slightly apprehensive.



Anxiety

You have never taken a flight because you haven't had the need to but you have been invited for a wedding and the only way to get there is to fly.

The thought of flying makes you anxious, even though the flight is months away.



Despite the anxiety, you book a ticket to the destination. But as the date nears, you start to worry about the journey. Several thoughts go through your mind—



Worry

"What if the plane crashes?"

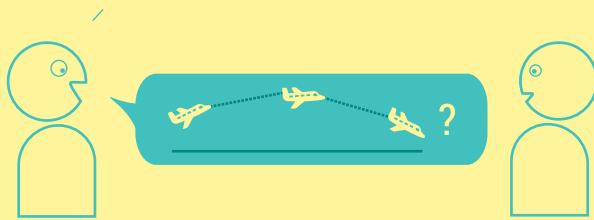
"What would happen to my family?"

"What if we have to make a water landing?
I don't know how to swim."

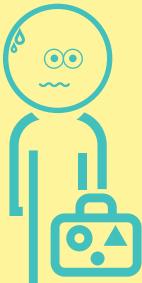
Fear



Your worries turn into genuine **fear**. You start to look up statistics on the internet. You ask people about their experiences with flying. You are unable to think past what is about to happen in a few days, and thoughts of the journey constantly cross your mind.



The day of your flight approaches. You are all packed and waiting at the boarding gate. The gate opens and they start boarding passengers for your flight.



Your mouth starts to go dry. Your hands begin to tremble. Thoughts start to race and you feel a knot in your stomach. Your adrenaline is rushing and as the time approaches for you to take the flight, you begin to panic.

Panic



This is the cycle from anxiety to panic. Sometimes the cycle completes itself and turns into panic, sometimes it stops at worry and sometimes it's just a moment of anxiety.

WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?

A panic attack is an intense episode of fear caused due to a perceived threat.

Going back to the example of taking your first flight, what we saw at the boarding gate was a glimpse of what a panic attack could be like. It has several symptoms and can feel like a very chaotic experience. Let's look at some of the symptoms:

Physical symptoms



Unexplained body pains



Sweating



Tunnel vision



Nausea



Increased heart rate



Chest pain



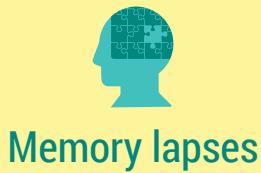
Pins and needles



Difficulty breathing



Brain fog



Memory lapses

Cognitive symptoms



Racing thoughts



Fear of dying



Fear of losing control



Mind chatter



Depersonalization



Trouble concentrating



Emotional symptoms



Intense need to escape



A sense of dread



Irritability



Worry



Tearfulness

"I'm going to die"

Thoughts



"I'm going to lose control"

"I'm going to faint"

"I will never feel normal again"

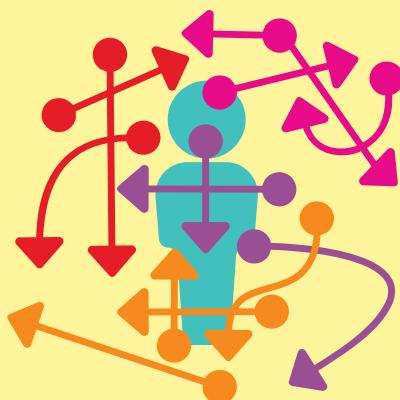
"I'm about to have a heart attack"

It's important to note that these are only a few examples of symptoms that one could experience during a panic attack. In reality, there are over a hundred different symptoms that could occur in varying degrees and combinations.

What does a panic attack feel like?

A panic attack can be a very fearful and chaotic experience, with all of the symptoms happening simultaneously. It generally lasts about 20 minutes, but sometimes it can go on for longer. This happens due to residual anxiety post the panic attack, or, successive panic attacks one after the other. The panic attack peaks at the ten minute point, which is when the intensity of symptoms is highest.

Physical symptoms
Cognitive symptoms
Emotional symptoms
Thoughts

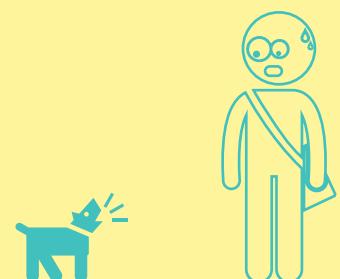


The loop of fear

We previously discussed the fight or flight mode that is ingrained in us. In the example of flying in an aeroplane, you couldn't handle the uncertainty of what was about to happen, which led to you having a panic attack.

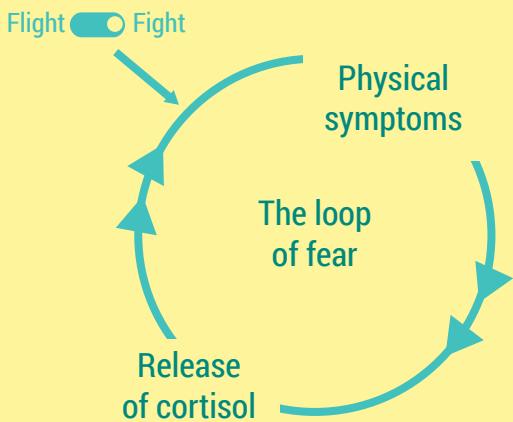
Now in an ideal situation, if the trigger or the threat disappears, the panic attack should cease as well. You would think that once the tiger runs away or the air hostess offers you the support you need, the brain orders these responses to shut down. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen.

In some cases, even if the trigger is in the form of a very real threat, its disappearance may not lead to the end of the panic attack. For example, if someone is afraid of dogs and starts to have a panic attack around a dog, it may not come to a sudden halt when the dog is out of the picture.



This happens because a loop of fear is created between the body and mind. Your brain registers a stimulus as a trigger and begins the fight or flight response, which results in your body exhibiting physical symptoms.

Sometimes these symptoms could be unfamiliar, like numbness or tingling at the tip of your fingers. Your brain may register this as a stimulus and think there's something genuinely wrong with your body, and release more cortisol and adrenaline.



This in turn increases the likelihood of more physical symptoms which can cause your mind and body to go into a loop of reacting to each other's symptoms—prolonging the discomfort of the panic attack.

At the end of the panic attack, you're likely to feel exhausted, both mentally and physically. You may also experience a period of numbness and depression. It may take anywhere between a few hours to a few days for your body to return to normalcy, this depends on the intensity of the panic attack.

Why do panic attacks still occur?

The fight or flight response is what causes panic attacks to happen. But long gone are the days when we encountered tigers in the wild. Our triggers these days are not as life-threatening—bank balances, social functions, a presentation at work or traffic. So why do panic attacks still happen?

Evolutionary psychology says this is a remainder of our ancestors' response mechanisms from the stone age days. So while our triggers are not as life-threatening, our bodies still react to stress like they are tigers in the wild.

The issue with this is that we could be faced with these triggers on a daily basis, sometimes even multiple times a day—the intensity of the threat has gone down but its frequency has increased. This has led to a large number of people struggling to deal with high stress levels, and some even suffering from anxiety disorders.

WHAT IS AN ANXIETY DISORDER?

An anxiety disorder is a mental illness that is characterized by experiencing anxiety, worry and fear on a level that can interfere with daily functioning.

The brain can pick up stimuli that isn't an actual threat, and trigger the fight or flight response.



This can lead to an unexplained panic attack—where all the symptoms exist, but without a seeming basis. When this process gets tangled, it results in *The Knot*, a state of anxiety that instead of helping us to stay alert and survive starts to disrupt our lives.

INTRODUCING THE KNOT AN ANXIETY DISORDER



Causes of anxiety disorder

What causes this helpful process to twist into The Knot?

Physical factors



Some medical conditions can cause symptoms of anxiety like hyperthyroidism; heart disease; use of caffeine, alcohol or cannabis and withdrawal from some substances. This is why a psychiatrist may ask you to get a blood test or physical examination before diagnosing you with an anxiety disorder.

Other mental illnesses



Anxiety can be a symptom of another mental illness like major depressive disorder, a personality disorder or a substance use disorder.

Environmental factors



Environmental factors include circumstances under which a person grew up in, for example, child abuse.

Genetic factors



If there is a history of anxiety disorders in the family, a person may be more likely to suffer from it.

What are the types of anxiety disorders?

The Knot can appear in many forms depending on the kind of thoughts and feelings that encompass the fears the person has.

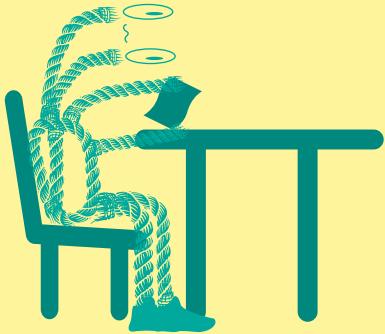
Fear of tragedy

When they believe they are going to be abandoned or gravely threatened

- Separation anxiety - excessive fear of being away from loved ones
- Specific fears/phobias



Fear of judgement



When they fear that they are going to be tested or judged

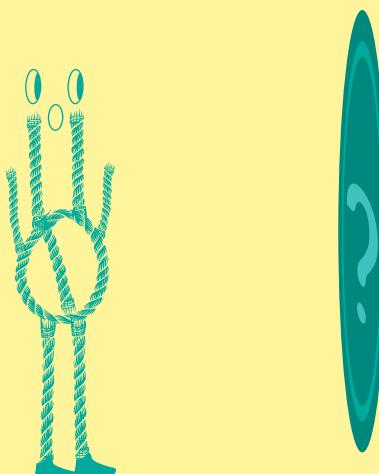
- Social anxiety - a persistent debilitating fear of being watched and judged
- Selective mutism - inability to speak in certain situations

Fear of panic

When they fear losing control and start to avoid things and places



- Panic disorder - fear the loss of control that comes with a panic attack
- Agoraphobia - avoid public places that might trigger a panic attack



Fear of the unknown

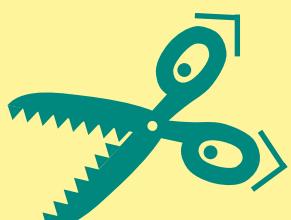
When they go to great lengths to avoid that which is uncertain or unknown

- Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) - fixation on impulses and thoughts

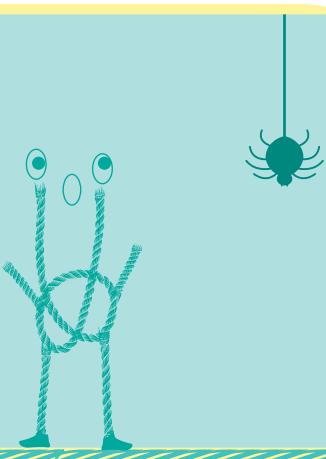
Fear caused by trauma

The knot is affected by past incidents of trauma.

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



PHOBIAS



A phobia is an extreme and irrational fear of an object or a situation. A person who has a phobia will react to the trigger with anxiety or panic.

A common phobia that people have is claustrophobia or the fear of closed spaces. People with this phobia are likely to feel anxious about using elevators or going to crowded places. Other common phobias are:



Aerophobia:
fear of flying



Arachnophobia:
fear of spiders



Cynophobia:
fear of dogs



Aquaphobia:
fear of water



Acrophobia:
fear of heights



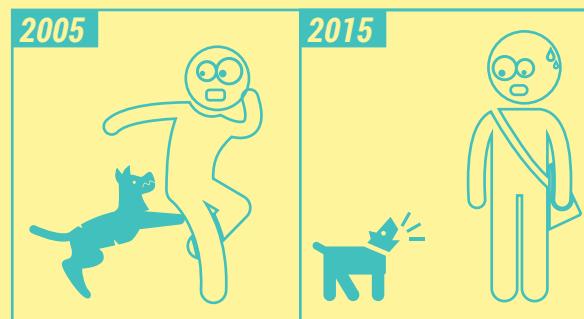
Trypanophobia:
fear of needles

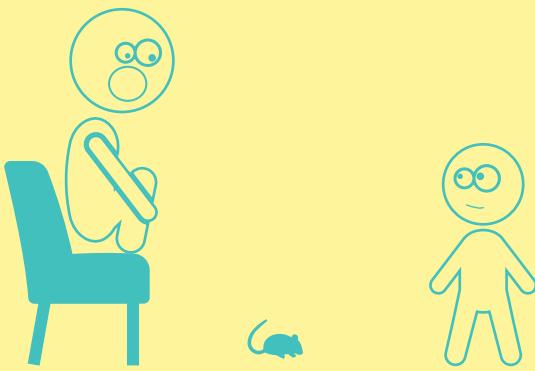
Causes of phobias

A phobia is caused by environmental factors which can influence learning fears by:

Classical conditioning

When a person has a negative experience with the trigger and they begin to make the association that a negative experience will always follow the trigger. For example, developing a fear of dogs after being bitten by one as a child.



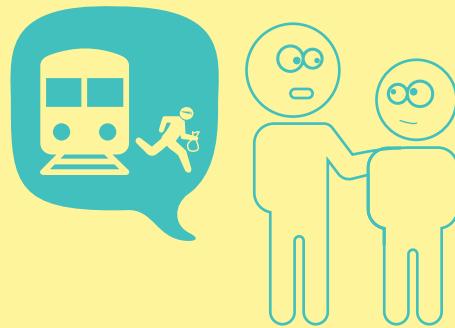


Vicarious acquisition

When a person develops a fear of something by seeing someone else around them be afraid of it. For example, a child may develop arachnophobia if their parent has a fearful reaction to spiders.

Informational or instructional fear

This is when a person is told to be afraid of something. For example, being afraid of thieves on a train because you were told to be careful about it.



It is important to remember that just because one has a fear of something, that does not mean they have a phobia. A phobia will cause a person to:

- Experience uncontrollable anxiety when exposed to the trigger
- Feel that the trigger must be avoided at all costs
- Not be able to function properly around the trigger
- Understand that the fear is irrational but will not be able to control their feelings and thoughts

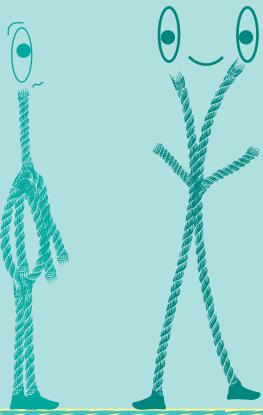
While it may not be very hard to live with a fear of snakes, some phobias can impair lives and cause severe distress to those who suffer from it.



HEALTH ANXIETY

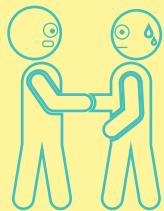
Health anxiety or hypochondria is a fear of falling ill. People with this phobia tend to constantly worry about their health— the slightest pain in the torso could make them believe they are about to have a heart attack. The internet gives us information on health at our fingertips. While this is useful, a person with hypochondria tends to google every symptom and get caught up in a loop of anxiety.

SOCIAL ANXIETY

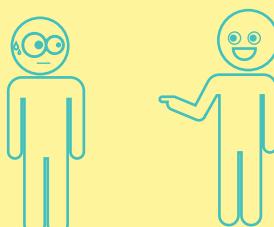


Social anxiety is the fear of situations that involve interacting with people due to the fear of being judged negatively.

A person suffering from social anxiety is likely to experience anxiety or even a panic attack when in these situations:



Being introduced to new people



Being criticized or teased



Being put in the spotlight



Being observed while doing something



Having to make a public speech



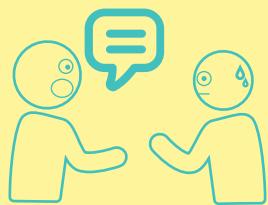
Meeting seniors or people of authority



Maintaining eye contact



Speaking on the phone

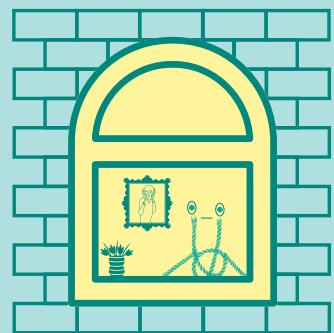


Having a conversation with someone

A person with social anxiety is most likely aware that their fear of the situation is irrational but may feel powerless to control the uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Social anxiety can affect someone's ability to live a daily life, impairing all of their social interactions including buying groceries, speaking with delivery agents, interacting with taxi drivers, speaking at work meetings and making new meaningful friendships.

While there is speculation that the cause for social anxiety might be genetic, there is no specific reason why one could develop this disorder. However, people with social anxiety are at a risk of developing a dependence on substances which they may use to subdue the anxiety that accompanies social situations.

PANIC DISORDER AND AGORAPHOBIA



Panic disorder is a mental health disorder characterized by frequent panic attacks for unknown reasons. Persons with this disorder may begin by experiencing panic attacks now and then. Over time, the frequency increases, disrupting daily life.

People with panic disorder can experience:

- Recurring panic attacks
- An intense worry about another panic attack
- Physical symptoms of anxiety
- Fear of places where they have experienced panic attacks in the past

In some extreme cases a person who experiences a panic attack may develop agoraphobia. **Agoraphobia** is the fear and avoidance of places and situations that may cause a panic attack and the resulting embarrassment. The agoraphobia can become so chronic that they may stop leaving their houses.

Causes of panic disorder

People who experience panic disorder are aware that their feelings are irrational but feel powerless to control their anxious thoughts and feelings. The causes of panic disorder may be

 **Biological:** due to the imbalance of chemicals in the brain

 **Genetic:** inherited from a parent

 **Cognitive:** physical symptoms of anxiety are misinterpreted to be life-threatening

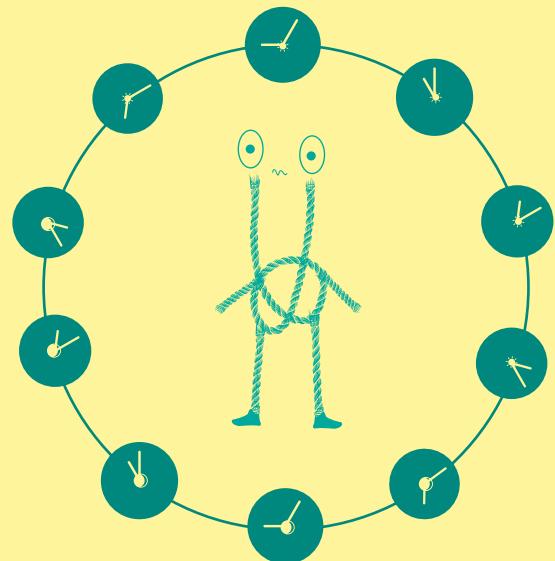
 **Psychological:** due to stress, life changes and environment

 **Substances:** use of substances such as nicotine, alcohol, caffeine or other psychoactive drugs

Like social anxiety, people with panic disorder are also at a higher risk of developing substance dependence, since they may use them to quell the feelings of anxiety.

GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a condition where a person suffers from extreme, irrational and constant anxiety over everyday life. They constantly worry about health, finances, family, friendships, relationships, career and even death. This can disrupt their daily lives with continual worry, restlessness, disturbed sleep, fatigue and irritability. They also experience uncomfortable physical symptoms of anxiety throughout the day.



GAD affects 5.8% of the Indian population



Causes of GAD

The causes of GAD may be:



Genetic: inherited from a parent



Substances: use of substances like nicotine, caffeine and psychoactive drugs



Socio-economic conditions: where marginalization or financial worry are a constant source of stress



Environment: low self-esteem, troubled upbringing and abuse

Diagnosis of GAD

If you have three of the following symptoms for most days in six months, you should consult a psychiatrist for a diagnosis:



Restlessness



Difficulty with concentration



Fatigue



Irritability



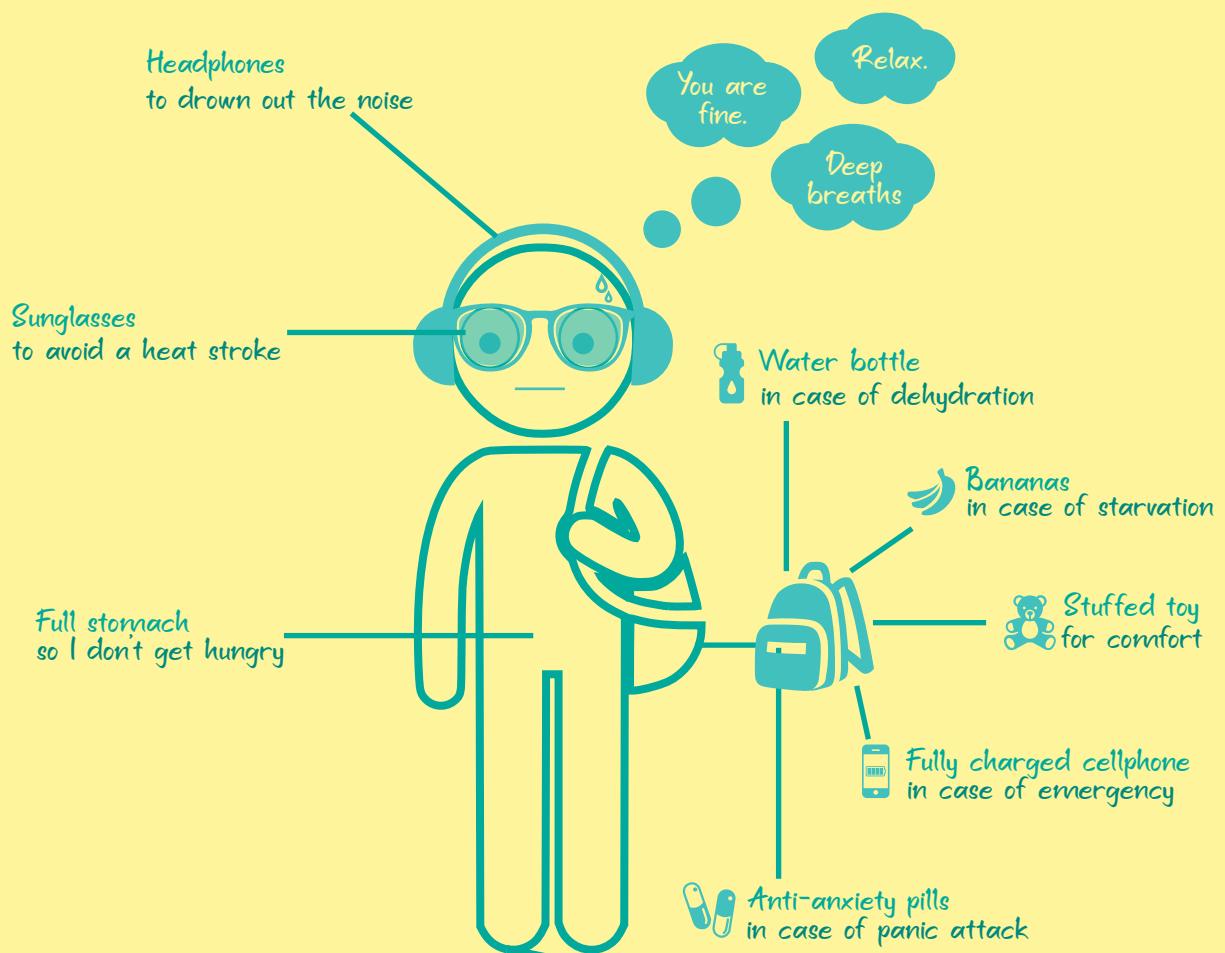
Muscle tension



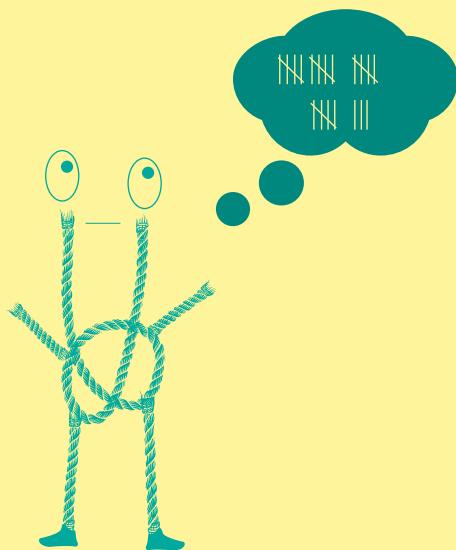
Difficulty with sleep

LIVING WITH GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER

I never leave my house without



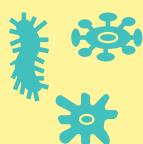
OBSSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER



As of 2019, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) listed OCD under anxiety disorders. OCD is a mental illness where a person suffers from obsessive and intrusive thoughts. They also have compulsions or urges to act in certain ways. Ignoring these compulsions can lead to high levels of anxiety and even cause panic attacks.

Obsessions

Obsessions are recurring thoughts, urges and mental imagery that cause anxiety such as:



Fear of contamination
(Germophobia)



Forbidden thoughts involving religion, sex and violence



Thoughts of harming others or self



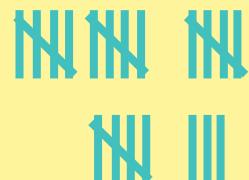
Need for symmetry and order

Compulsions

Compulsions are repetitive behaviors or rituals that the person feels the urge to do in reaction to obsessive thoughts, like



Hoarding



Uncontrollable counting



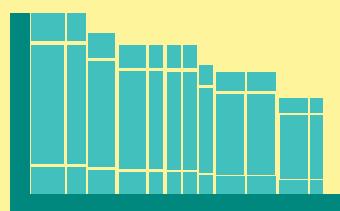
Repeatedly washing hands



Excessive cleaning



Constantly checking on things
(whether the door is locked,
the stove is off, the iron is off)



Arranging things in
a preferred manner

Performing these tasks relieves them of the anxiety they are feeling.

"It's just my OCD"

There is a widely known myth that if you like things in order and like to be tidy, you may have OCD. For example, you may like to arrange your books in the order of their height or feel the need to straighten a crooked painting when you see one. While these could be compulsions, a person has to have obsessive thoughts; accompanying anxiety and the relief from anxiety after performing the ritual for it to be classified as OCD. There are some other myths about OCD and it is important to remember that:

- Not everything a person with OCD does is a compulsion or a ritual.
- They are not in control of these thoughts or behaviors.
- People with OCD do not derive any pleasure from performing the rituals.
- These behaviors are disruptive to their lives.

Causes of OCD

A clear cause is yet to be defined for why someone develops OCD but research speculates that it could be:



Biological: due to lapses in brain structure and functioning

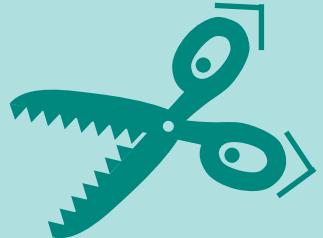


Genetic: inherited from a parent



Environment: from incidents of childhood trauma

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER



Post-traumatic stress disorder is a mental illness that develops after a person has been exposed to a traumatic event.

Symptoms of PTSD

Let's take the scenario of a house fire to understand the types of symptoms that a person with PTSD can experience.



Reliving the trauma



Flashbacks



Nightmares



Terrifying thoughts

Avoidance



Avoiding places, events or objects that remind them of the trauma



Avoiding thoughts and emotions about the trauma

Arousal and reactivity



Increased startle response



Tension



Difficulty falling asleep



Anger outbursts

Cognitive and mood



Inability to remember significant details of the trauma



Negative thoughts about the world and/or self



Guilt and self-blame



Anhedonia

While reliving the trauma and avoidance are experienced when they are exposed to a trigger, the arousal, cognitive and mood symptoms can occur without triggers and impair their ability to live a high quality of life.

Symptoms of PTSD in children

Children with PTSD exhibit different symptoms than adults. These include:



Bedwetting despite being toilet trained



Being unable to speak or forgetting how to



Dramatizing the traumatic event during playtime



Being overly attached to a parent or other adult

What can cause PTSD?

As the name suggests, a person can develop PTSD after experiencing stress from a traumatic event. This event can be any event that the person feels incapable of handling emotionally like:

- Living through a dangerous event like a robbery or violence
- Getting physically injured
- Seeing another person get injured
- Witnessing a death or seeing a dead body
- Childhood abuse
- Feeling horror or extreme fear

So why does trauma cause PTSD for some and not for others?

Some people are at a higher risk of trauma because of the following reasons:

- Having insufficient social support after a stressful event
- Handling other stress after the event for example, taking care of one grief-stricken parent when the other dies
- Mental illness
- Substance abuse

TREATMENT

Anxiety disorders can be treated with medication and therapy. There are also a number of things that you can do to alleviate the severity of the anxiety you feel.



Medication

Depending on the symptoms, anxiety disorders are treated with antidepressants, anti-anxiety medication and sedatives. These are prescription medication and should not be taken without the consultation of a psychiatrist. If you do start medication by prescription, the dosage should not be stopped or reduced without the consultation of a psychiatrist.



Therapy

Therapy can be very effective in disrupting thought processes that lead to anxiety. Your psychiatrist will prescribe the type of therapy based on the kind of anxiety you are experiencing.

Exposure therapy is a technique in behavior therapy that involves trained mental health professionals guiding persons with anxiety disorders to confront their triggers without the intention to cause harm. Its use has been effective in treating:

- GAD
- Social anxiety
- OCD
- PTSD
- Some phobias

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapy whose goal is to break cognitive patterns that lead to emotional, behavioral and psychiatric problems. CBT helps identify dysfunctional thought patterns and behavior that are causing the anxiety. Therapists work along with the person to help them learn or relearn constructive skills and habits which then helps them face their triggers in a rational way. CBT is a short-term therapy but the effects last a lifetime. It can be as effective as medication in treating anxiety and is used to treat all anxiety disorders.

Self-care

Making lifestyle changes can enhance the effects of medication and therapy and contribute to a faster recovery. Some of the changes you can make are:



Daily exercise



Well-balanced diet



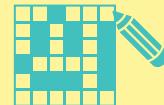
Limited intake of caffeine,
alcohol and nicotine



Mindfulness exercises



Meditation or yoga



Interest or hobby

HOW TO BE AN ALLY

Living with *The Knot* can be a crippling and isolating experience. People with anxiety can benefit from having a good support system that understands their anxiety and offers them empathy. Here are some ways that you can be a good ally to someone who has an anxiety disorder:

- ✓ **Offer to hear them out when they are having a panic attack:** Ask them to call you if they are feeling anxious or on the verge of a panic attack. Talk them through their feelings without being judgemental.
- ✗ **Do not try to rationalize their fears:** As we have learned, those who suffer from anxiety disorder are aware that their fears are irrational. Invalidating the symptoms they are going through can make them feel worse. Instead, accept that they are having trouble with them and hear them out instead.
- ✗ **Do not offer advice:** It is certainly hard for someone who has not struggled with anxiety to understand the gravity of what they are going through. It might be natural for you to ask them to distract themselves or not think about their triggers; but this may translate as you not validating their struggles. Listen as much as possible and refrain from giving advice unless they specifically ask you for help.
- ✓ **Find out if they have a support system,** other friends, family, mentors, etc - that they can discuss this with.
- ✓ **Find them professional help:** Encourage them to seek professional help by reminding them about how commonplace anxiety disorders are and that there is no shame in doing so.

HOW TO CALM DOWN DURING A PANIC ATTACK

When you are having a panic attack, your brain is convinced that it is under threat. So it is necessary for you to make a conscious effort to remind your brain that you are in a safe place and nothing will happen to you. This is achieved by doing a grounding exercise.

Ground yourself

A grounding exercise is a technique that helps your brain recognize that you are in a safe space by consciously making use of all of your senses. Some things that can help you ground are:

- Feeling the ground with bare feet
- Counting trees or red cars (if you're travelling)
- Feeling the texture of the clothes you are wearing

A common and easy way to ground is to do the 54321 exercise.

THE 54321 EXERCISE

Count and observe

5 things you can see



4 things you can feel



3 things you can hear



2 things you can smell



1 things you can taste



Take deep breaths

During a panic attack, your lung function increases and can lead you to hyperventilate. Hyperventilation can disrupt the levels of CO₂ in your blood which causes less blood to reach the brain. Taking deep breaths can normalize these levels and bring the panic attack to a halt.



Take a deep breath through your nose



Hold for five seconds



Exhale slowly through the mouth while making an O shape



Repeat until panic attack subsides

Use a panic assistance track or a meditation guide



Listening to a guided meditation or a panic assistance track can help distract you and let the panic attack pass. These tracks are available on the internet, as well as music and video streaming services.

If you get panic attacks often, you might want to download a track onto your phone for easy access.

LIST OF ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

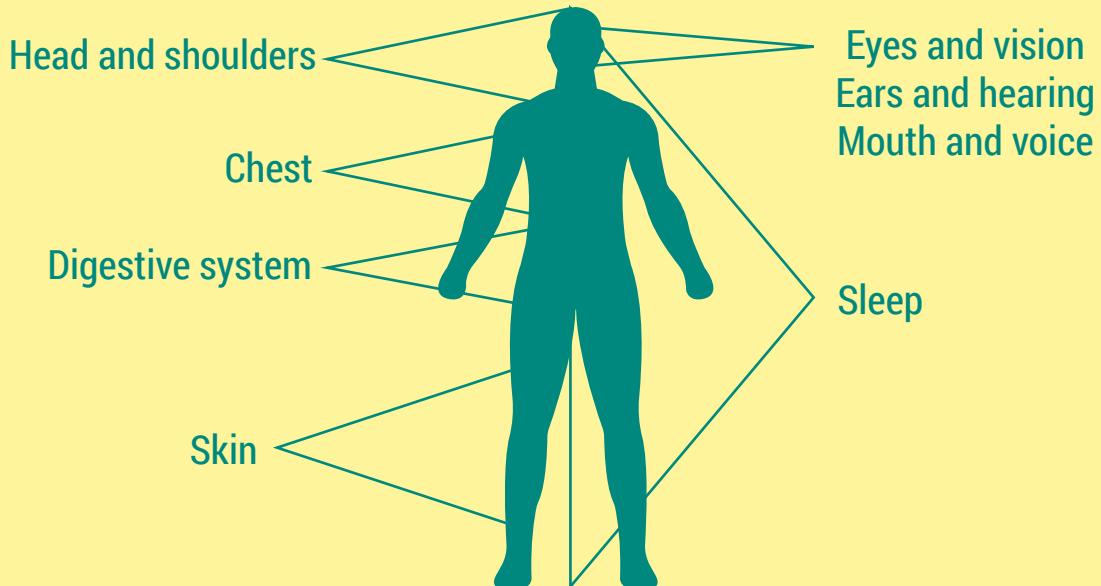
It is nearly impossible to put together an exhaustive list of every possible symptom of anxiety that one can experience. There can be many unexplained sensations throughout the body that perhaps result from anxiety.

It is important to note that many of the symptoms listed here can be a sign of an actual medical issue. However, it could be attributed to anxiety if:

- The symptoms occur at random and are not consistent
- The symptom occurs during a panic attack
- A medical cause has been ruled out
- There is no other explanation for the symptom

The symptoms of anxiety can be better understood when divided into the following:

Physical symptoms



Mental symptoms



Physical symptoms



Head and shoulders

- Feeling dizzy
- Feeling fog headed
- Feeling giddy
- Feeling like there is a tight band tied around your head
- Headaches
- Neck pain
- Shooting pains
- Shoulder pain
- Stiffness
- Unexplained hair loss or thinning



Digestive system

- Abdominal pain
 - Acidity
 - Bloating
 - Constipation
 - Craving sugar
 - Diarrhea
 - Lack of appetite
 - Stress eating
 - Loss of bladder or bowel control
 - Nausea
 - Sudden urge to urinate
- The thought of eating makes you nauseous



Chest

- Chest pain
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Feeling like you're forcing yourself to breathe
- Feeling like you're going to stop breathing if you don't concentrate on it
- Feeling like a tight band is tied around your chest
- Racing heart
- Feeling like you're about to have a heart attack
- Rib pain and tightness
- Shooting pains in the chest
- Tightness



Skin

- Burning
- Feels cold or wet
- Itching
- Numbness
- Pain
- Pins and needles
- Rashes
- Redness
- Sensitive skin
- Tingling



Eyes and vision

- Blurred vision
- Dilated or contracted pupils

- Dry or watery eyes
- Feeling of floating when you close your eyes
- Flashing of lights when eyes are closed
- Itchy eyes
- Seeing spots
- Sensitivity to light (lights seem brighter and feel uncomfortable)
- Tunnel vision
- Twitching



Ear and hearing

- Feeling like your ears are blocked
- Feeling pressure in your ears
- Hearing pulsing in the ears
- Hearing white-noise like humming or buzzing or ringing
- Itchy ears
- Reduced or increased hearing
- Sensitivity to sound (sounds seem louder and feel uncomfortable)
- Tinnitus



Mouth and voice

- Bad taste or metallic taste in the mouth
- Changes in voice: shakiness, change in tone and pitch, being unable to speak
- Clenching of jaw
- Dry mouth

- Feeling a lump in your throat
- Feeling like you can't swallow
- Feeling like your tongue is swollen
- Feel like you can't talk properly - your mouth isn't moving right
- Frequent burping or yawning
- Grinding teeth
- Stiffness of jaw
- Tingling in the mouth
- Tongue feeling weird - tingling, pins and needles, itching or burning
- Twitching lips



Sleep

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Disturbed sleep
- Feeling anxious when you wake up
- Feeling like you are gonna die in your sleep
- Insomnia
- Intrusive thoughts about fears when you close your eyes to fall asleep
- Jolting awake
- Nightmares and bizarre dreams
- Waking up with a panic attack

Mental symptoms



Cognition

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Disorientation
- Feeling disconnected from reality
- Feeling like you're not yourself
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling spaced out
- Feeling trapped in your mind
- Feel like everything is in slow-motion
- Getting distracted easily
- Memory loss
- Mind chatter
- Obsessing about getting rid of the anxiety
- Obsessing about sensations
- Racing thoughts
- Thoughts that stick and play repeatedly—images, concepts, tunes



Emotion

- Angst
- Tearfulness
- Depression
- Mood swings
- Emotional numbness
- Alertness
- Everything feels scary
- Irritability

- Anhedonia
- Loss of touch with reality
- Feeling burdened with pressure



Common fears

- Fear of losing control
- Fear of impending doom
- Fear of what others think of you
- Fear of being trapped
- Fear of being in public
- Fear of dying
- Fear of making a fool of yourself
- Fear of fainting
- Fear of losing your mind
- Fear of irrational objects and situations
- Fear of being alone
- Fear of having a health issue



Behavior

- Being afraid all the time
- Being overly startled
- Increased self-awareness
- Need to sit close to exits
- Need to face the entry when outdoors
- Need to know exact plans when planning outdoor activities
- Avoiding crowded areas
- Avoiding travelling
- Avoiding public transport



The end