

TYPES OF ANXIETY

We tend to use the term 'anxiety' for many varied kinds of feelings – all of them uncomfortable and associated with unhealthy thinking. However, there is value in knowing exactly what kind of anxiety you are dealing with. Anxieties sometimes occur together and may overlap – like panic and social anxiety, or panic and agoraphobia (the fear and avoidance of places or situations that might make you panic or feel trapped, helpless or embarrassed). They each need to be treated in their own way. The sequence of medicine and therapy will also vary, depending on whether the anxiety is acute right now, or a more low-grade, chronic (persistent) anxiety with episodes of flare-ups.

DO YOU HAVE AN ANXIETY DISORDER OR IS YOUR ANXIETY LINKED TO A SPECIFIC ISOLATED INCIDENT OR PHASE IN LIFE

First to consider, is whether this is an anxiety disorder or a specific isolated incident or phase in life, causing the anxiety

- A disorder has usually started by the teenage years, and will show up through life in the form of acute episodes which last weeks at a time.
- If the anxiety is due to a trauma, adjustment to change or a specific situation like needing a medical procedure, it must still be treated but in different ways. For example, chronic medicine and follow-up therapy may not be necessary once the trigger situation has settled.

The other important consideration when talking about anxiety, is to look for the occurrence of depression in some form. There is a significant overlap between anxiety and depression about 70% of the time, or more (this is called co-morbidity). Depression is fairly common after having lived with untreated anxiety for a long time, and feeling helpless as well as exhausted by it.

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The most common symptoms of overlap include:

- Agitation
- Irritability
- Sleep and appetite disturbance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue and
- Nonspecific cardiopulmonary (heart and/or lung) or gastrointestinal (stomach) complaints.

You can see why it takes a trained professional to separate these out into the various disorders that may be going on.

OVERLAPS BETWEEN ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AS WELL AS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS ANXIETY DISORDERS

Not only is there significant overlap between anxiety and depression, but also between the various anxiety disorders themselves. Let's explore this a little further by looking at the relationship between three of them.

Generalised anxiety disorder

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is probably the most common and familiar of the anxieties. Key features include being worried all the time, even when there are no signs of trouble. The body is constantly tense and there are frequent aches and pains that can't be traced to physical illness or injury. There is a high level of tiredness yet it's hard to get to sleep due to a busy (worrying) mind. The content of the worry in generalised anxiety disorder changes over time, unlike the other anxieties where the worry or anticipation is linked to a specific fear, like performance fear (social phobia), physical symptoms (panic), or a specific thing (simple phobia for example of dogs, heights or bugs).

Dr Colinda Linde
M.A.Clin.Psych;D.Litt et Phil
Clinical Psychologist.

Social anxiety disorder

Social anxiety disorder (social phobia) is a different kind of anxiety, where there is worry and anticipation but it is specific to performance situations – socially, public speaking or presentation situations. If it's specific it will only lead to anxiety before, during and after a particular performance situation, like giving a speech or meeting new people. It can also be generalised, where any situation putting you as the centre of attention is to be avoided – like eating, drinking, writing, making a call in front of others, walking into a room where others are already seated or speaking up at a meeting or in a social group. The core fear is of being observed, and the possibility of doing something even slightly embarrassing.

Panic disorder

Panic disorder is acute (short lived) at the beginning and during an actual panic attack, which is made up of the sudden appearance of strange, inexplicable physical symptoms. These include shortness of breath, heart racing, stomach symptoms like cramping or diarrhoea, and feeling like you are going crazy or might die. There is no obvious reason for these symptoms, so even when they have settled there is a 'fear of fear' cycle – worrying about when they could appear again, and avoiding any situation or activity that could possibly trigger another attack. Over time, more and more places and activities are avoided, just to be sure, and this leads to agoraphobia – where you feel afraid and unsafe anywhere but at home. If you feel that anxiety is beginning to impact your day-to-day functioning, contact the Healthy Company support line for further professional assistance or advice.

When worry starts to dominate your waking thoughts, and keeps you up at night or in the early hours of the morning, especially if there is not a specific reason to be causing it, it is always an indication for you to seek help. If you feel that worrying thoughts are beginning to impact your day-to-day functioning, contact the HealthyCompany Care support line for further professional assistance or advice.

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Healthy Company is here for you. Contact us through the Discovery app, www.discovery.co.za or **0800 320 420**