

4 Tips to Manage an Anxiety Attack

Anxiety is a physiological and natural response to fear or stress in preparation for a real (or perceived) threat. It involves connections in the brain to the endocrine system, adrenal-cortical system, and the sympathetic nerve system.* Anxiety can be experienced (mildly, moderately, and severely) during your everyday activities.

When people experience acute (sudden) and severe anxiety, they often label them as “panic attacks.” However, more commonly, people are likely to experience “anxiety attacks” or intense symptoms of anxiety in response worries or fears related to a specific situation. Panic attacks often happen suddenly without a specific trigger or cue and usually characterized by intense physical symptoms such (racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, feeling lightheaded, and hot flashes), intense fears of dying or losing control, and detachment from reality, and generally last about 10-15 minutes.

Anxiety attacks are likely to build and intensify over time, and in some situations, lead to panic attacks, if the anxiety symptoms are not addressed. Most people have one or two panic attacks in their lifetimes, and the problem goes away when the stress dissolves. Approximately 2-3% of the population will develop an anxiety disorder.

Symptoms of anxiety attacks can include:

- apprehension and worry
- significant distress
- fear
- heart palpitations
- rapid breathing
- restlessness, difficulty falling asleep
- trouble concentrating
- nausea, upset stomach

The following tips can help if you feel you are experiencing intense feelings of acute anxiety:

- **Be Mindful.** Mindfulness can help you understand and navigate an anxiety attack. Stop what you are doing (put down your phone), notice your current thoughts, emotions, and pay attention to how your body feels. Focusing and identifying (but not reacting to) those very basic things can help to detach from irrational fears and/ or can help you identify what you need at that moment.
- **Self Talk.** Anxiety can be scary and overwhelming, but they are largely controllable when you understand what is happening and what you need at that time. Name the emotion, remind yourself that you will be okay and that it will pass, and start focusing on calming your physical symptoms.
- **Relax.** If you are experiencing short quick breaths, focus on each inhale and exhale to slow it down. Take long deep inhale breaths breathing through your nose to 4, and then slowly exhale through your mouth to 8. Repeat until you notice your breathing slow down. Additional relaxation techniques include laying down, listening to music, aromatherapy, walking in nature, etc.

Anxiety disorders are very common; affecting 40 million adults in the United States, and 1 out of 3 people globally (according to the World Health Organizations). They are also highly treatable; therapy, medication, and complementary and alternative treatments, have all proven to be effective courses of treatment. ***

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*[Anxiety: Embracing Your Fears](#)

**[What's the Difference Between a Panic Attack and an Anxiety Attack](#)

***[Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#). Last accessed January 19, 2012.