

Worry, Anxiety, Panic, Fear?

What is the difference between



- PTSD
- Acute Stress Disorder
- Panic attack
- Severe anxiety

- Mild/moderate anxiety

The ranges of anxiety
 Normal/healthy anxiety

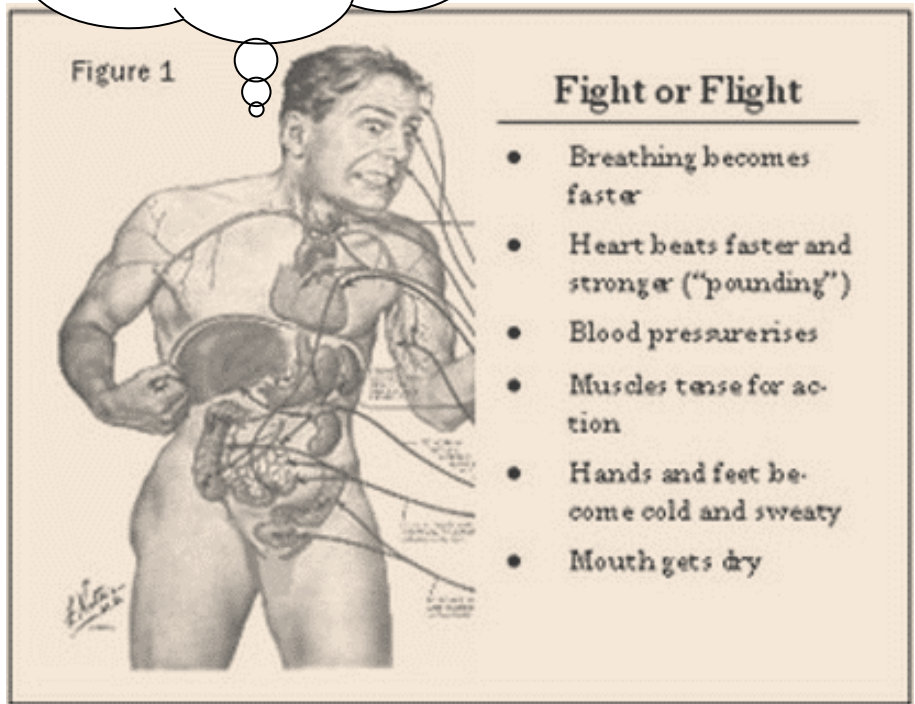
Although this information contains criteria from DSM-5, use this as a guide to discuss with the healthcare professional of your choice. This material is not a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment.

So how is worry different from anxiety and fear?

Worry, anxiety and fear are functions of the alert system in your brain. They are necessary and essential to your survival. Worry, anxiety and fear are normal... until they are not.

Worry refers to your **thoughts** about potential threats or danger

Anxiety is the **physical sensations** of arousal in your body created by the sympathetic nervous system. When real danger is ACTUALLY present.



Fear activates your body's **fight or flight response** to immediate danger.

Your fight or flight response will override the thinking part of your brain. **Fear is activated in the limbic system of the brain, which processes information faster than the logic part of the brain.** So if worry, anxiety and fear are not only normal, they are essential for survival, what's the problem?

Sometimes, the brain's alert system has a glitch—false alarms blast a warning for no reason, triggering anxiety when no danger is actually present.

In some people, the brain makes up really scary stories that keep them awake at night or make it impossible to relax and just live life. When this happens, worry, anxiety and fear are symptoms of what the medical community refers to as *anxiety disorders*. **Anxiety disorders are brain diseases. Anxiety is considered a disorder when the brain triggers more anxiety and fear throughout the body than is considered adaptive in the situation or event.** Learning to cope with anxiety diseases begins with understanding the differences between healthy anxiety, (which keeps us alert and safe) and the more maladaptive anxiety levels that impair decision making, disrupt sleep and reduce quality of life.

Understanding Anxiety as a Disease

Knowing how to distinguish between the different levels of anxiety helps with understanding how best to cope. Use this guide to identify your anxiety level.

“Healthy” Anxiety

- Body is “ready” and “alert” like a tennis player anticipating the serve.
- Good level of anxiety for school and work.
- Normal heart rate and pulse rate.
- Feeling “in control” without intense fear or anxiety.
- Continues to be capable of insight but may become slightly impatient or irritable.
- Vigilant. Aware of surroundings.
- Good concentration and attention span.
- Good problem-solving.
- Good decision-making.

Mild to moderate anxiety symptoms respond well to deep breathing, meditation, yoga, good sleep habits, improved nutrition, physical exercise, and access to nature.

Additional symptoms resolve with the elimination of caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.

Mild - Moderate Anxiety

(Increased discomfort)

- Nervousness, dread.
- Difficulty controlling negative thoughts.
- Moodiness common. More emotionally fragile.
- May become either angry or tearful.
- Breathing faster, heart-pounding, headache.
- Fatigue, difficulty falling asleep.
- Dry mouth, tightness in throat.
- Restlessness, butterflies in stomach, nausea, diarrhea, heartburn, belching.
- Muscles tight, muscle tension or increased pain.
- Perspiring, sweating.
- Talking louder or faster, unable to listen as well.
- Trouble thinking or making decisions.
- Worry. Ruminating: repeating thoughts over and over.
- Attention, concentration and learning impaired by anxiety.

When these symptoms last for several months, impair quality of life, and no other medical reason is found, these symptoms may indicate a **mild to moderate anxiety disorder**.

Severe anxiety

May result in an emergency room visit or a consult with a cardiologist. These symptoms are so uncomfortable and distressing that many sufferers will fear a cardiac or pulmonary problem. After a complete battery of tests rules out other medical causes for the symptoms below, these symptoms are referred to **as a severe anxiety disorder.**

- Body feels hot
- Urge to use the bathroom: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea.
- Breathing shallow and rapid or feeling like you can't breathe.
- Speech-rapid, constant, loud or high pitched.
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat, may feel pressure, as if someone is sitting on your chest.
- Headache.
- Wringing hands, trembling, shaking, pacing, twitching and other involuntary movements.
- Intense moodiness: anger or tears.
- Out of body feeling: wooden, strange or unreal.
- Feeling powerless, insecure, low self-esteem, inadequate, helpless, "victim" thinking.
- Unable to hear and understand new information. Learning is blocked by anxiety.
- Emotions may trigger "fight or flight" response.

Consult your health care professional if your anxiety symptoms cause extreme distress or interfere with your quality of life.

Cognitive behavioral therapy and medication may also serve as coping tools for moderate and severe anxiety disorders.

For additional clarification of symptoms, scroll down to Tool #5: Testing.. Testing.. Testing!

After you identify symptoms of anxiety, panic and trauma, please have a discussion with your health care provider about strategies to address your health and wellness. Remember mental health is brain and body health!