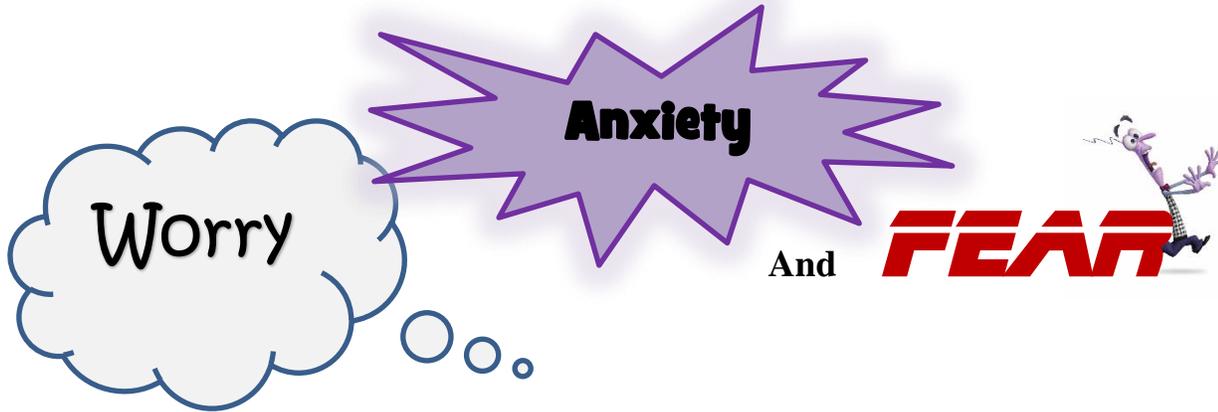


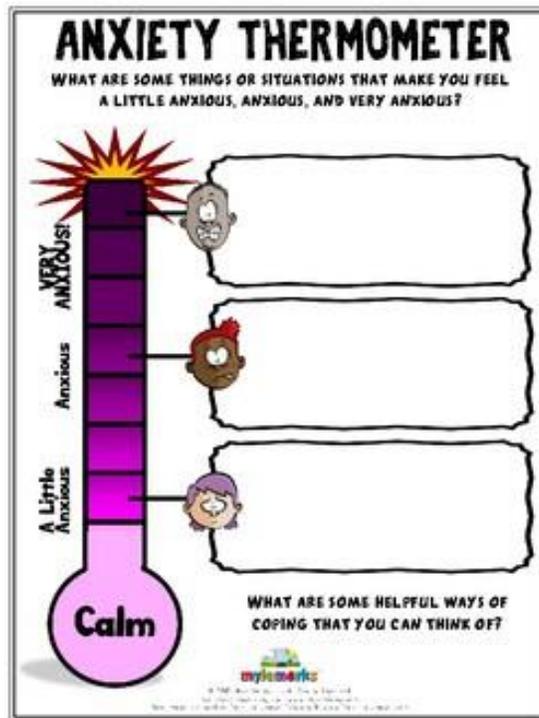
# Worry— Anxiety— Panic— Fear?

*What is the difference?*



- PTSD
- Acute Stress Disorder
- Panic attack
- Severe anxiety
- General Anxiety Disorder
- Mild/moderate anxiety

**The ranges of anxiety-yes there is a “normal”.** Anxiety does not feel great—but not all anxious feelings are abnormal. 80% of the U.S. adults experience normal, healthy anxiety. 18.5% are diagnosed with anxiety disorders each year. The pandemic is understandably increasing those numbers.



Although this information contains criteria from DSM-5, this material is not a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please use this material as a guide to discuss with your mental health and wellness healthcare professionals of your choice.

## So ..... how is worry different from anxiety and fear?

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

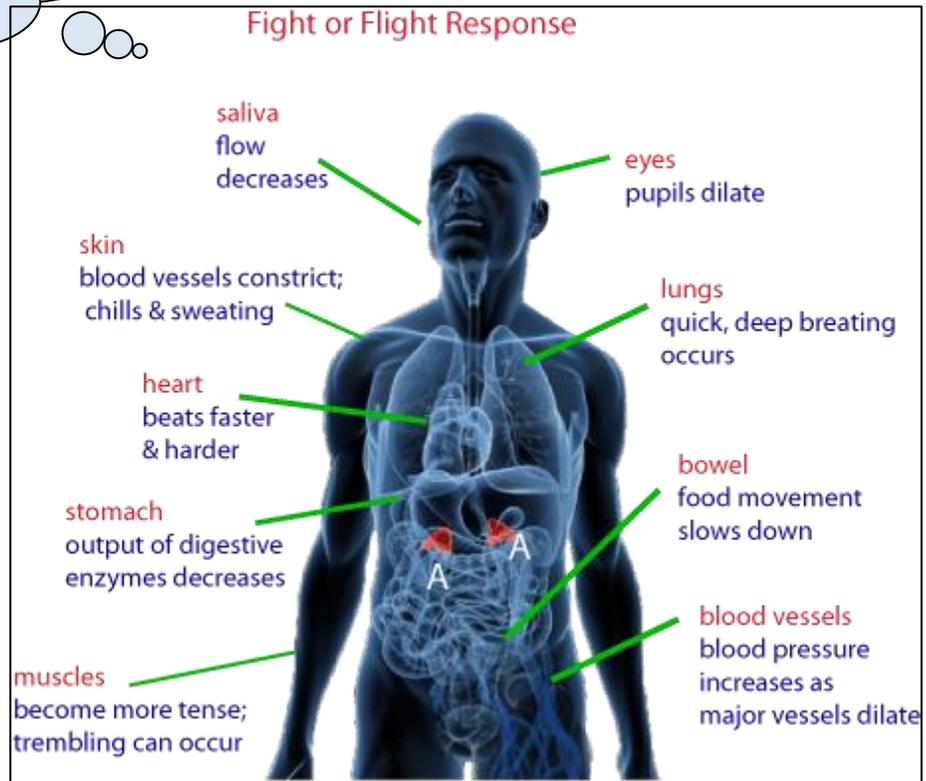
Worry, anxiety and fear are functions of the alert system in your brain. They are necessary and essential to your survival.

Worry, anxiety and fear are normal... until they are not.

**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 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-during a pandemic, for example) 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. Heads up! Maintaining awareness like an athlete on the field or court, capable of peak performance.
- 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 reduction or elimination of caffeine, nicotine, cannabis, and alcohol.

### Mild - Moderate Anxiety

*(Increased discomfort)*

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**.

- 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.

## 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.

### **So if those symptoms are severe anxiety, what is a panic attack?**

Your first panic attack is usually so frightening that you think you are dying. The good news is that you are not, it's a panic attack. [Click here for the DSM-5 criteria.](#) Watch the [panic videos](#) on this site.

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

Cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness meditation, yoga, exercise, good sleep and nutrition habits, access to nature and medication serve as coping tools for anxiety disorders. For additional clarification of symptoms, check out the next tool on this page: Testing.. Testing.. Testing! After you identify symptoms of [anxiety](#), panic and [acute stress](#), 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!