

ANXIETY

Photo: Christian Schwarz

Let's talk

When anxiety becomes a disorder

Everyone knows what anxiety feels like. Anxiety is a normal reaction to situations that might be dangerous for us. It helps us recognize, manage, and avoid dangers and threats. Anxiety becomes a problem when people suffer from pronounced and persistent but unfounded or exaggerated anxieties that significantly affect their normal lives. We call this an anxiety disorder.

Typical characteristics of anxiety disorder:

- > The degree of anxiety doesn't match the situation.
- > People with anxiety disorder often find it difficult to overcome the anxiety on their own.
- > They avoid situations that they think will make them feel anxious.
- > The anxiety lasts longer and happens more often over time.
- > People with anxiety disorder suffer distress, or it clearly restricts their daily lives.

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental illnesses. About one in five suffer from anxiety disorder for some time at some point in their lives. Many people are not aware that they have an anxiety disorder and only seek treatment very late. Nowadays, anxiety disorders can be successfully treated with psychotherapy and medication if necessary, the sooner the better.

Agoraphobia

Fear of places where escape would be difficult

Agoraphobia is the fear of being in places where escape would be difficult or experienced as embarrassing in the event of unease or panic attacks, and where help would not be available straight away. People with agoraphobia typically avoid such situations or are very uncomfortable in them.

Situations that commonly trigger anxiety in agoraphobia:

- > crowds
- > public places
- > driving
- > cinemas, theatres, and restaurants
- > department stores and supermarkets
- > travelling alone in trains, buses, or planes
- > when waiting somewhere

Social anxiety disorder (Social phobia)

Fear of other people's negative opinions

People with social anxiety disorder are anxious about being at the centre of attention, behaving inappropriately or embarrassingly, and being criticized or judged negatively because of it. Social situations are consistently avoided or only endured with intense anxiety. This can lead people to withdraw more and more, until they're almost completely isolated.

Situations that commonly trigger anxiety in social anxiety disorder:

- > being the centre of attention
- > speaking in public
- > expressing your own opinion
- > eating and drinking in front of others
- > writing something while others watch
- > meeting new people

Photo: René Bay



Panic disorder

Unexpected and repeated panic attacks with fear of the next panic attack

Panic disorder occurs as repeated, spontaneous, and unpredictable panic attacks. People with panic disorder experience repeated episodes of intense anxiety, which begin very suddenly and peak within a few minutes. They feel helpless and are afraid of going mad or dying. With each panic attack, the fear of suffering another attack increases.

Common physical symptoms of panic attacks:

- > palpitations, increased heart rate
- > shortness of breath, choking sensations
- > sweating, trembling
- > chest pain or discomfort
- > tingling, numbness
- > hot flushes, chills
- > feeling lightheaded, feeling faint
- > nausea, stomachache
- > dizziness, headache

Generalized anxiety disorder

Persistent anxiety with exaggerated concern about everyday events and problems

Generalized anxiety disorder occurs as frequent strong, persistent, and exaggerated fears and worries. These don't only happen in acute problems or times of crisis, but are more or less constant. People with generalized anxiety disorder are always tense and restless. They are often unable to concentrate and can become tired quickly.

Generalized anxiety disorder often involves worries about yourself or people near you:

- > having an accident
- > suffering from an illness or becoming ill
- > becoming unemployed
- > worrying about money
- > not completing school or studies
- > failing at work
- > having problems with your spouse or partner

Specific phobias

Fear of clearly identifiable and defined objects or situations

People with specific phobias have pronounced and excessive anxiety of particular objects or situations. The anxiety is disproportionate to the actual danger and can be as strong as a panic attack. As a result, they usually avoid any contact with the object or situation they fear or only endure it with great anxiety. It is only called a specific phobia if the anxiety is very strong and seriously restricts professional and social activities.

Typical objects and situations of specific phobias include:

- > animals such as dogs, spiders, and snakes
- > situations such as heights, narrow spaces, and flying
- > natural phenomena such as storms, thunderstorms, and fire
- > blood, syringes, injuries, and medical treatment
- > other situations, such as situations that might lead to choking or vomiting



Photo: Sabrina Spagnuolo



You can find more information about anxiety (in French and German) and a list of help and counselling services in Luxembourg at www.prevention-panique.lu

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