

# Anxiety

**Anxiety** can be a normal reaction to certain life circumstances or it can be a disease in itself. Fear of a real, remembered or imagined situation triggers off physical reactions that, if intense or long-lasting, produce suffering and reduce quality of life. Anxiety can cause panic attacks, phobias, or generalised malaise.

**Panic attacks** are sometimes caused by situations that appear unsurmountable, although what triggers them is often unknown. When people suffer attacks, they think they are going to die or suddenly go mad. They feel intense palpitations, shortness of breath, paleness, sweating, nausea, vomiting, headache, dizziness, and sometimes pass out. Panic attacks last for a few minutes or, at most, a few hours and then subside without any after-effects. As they often reoccur, they become a motive for intense fear. Facing them, or trying to escape and avoid them may be temporarily reassuring but it can also cause repetition of episodes. To understand attacks and make them less unpleasant, the physical sensations associated with panic can be induced voluntarily. Tachycardia, for example, can be induced by physical exercise.

**Phobia** is unjustified fear that cannot be reasoned with. Dwelling insistently on it can increase the fear. It may be a fear of a specific situation that does not restrict the patient's life (e.g. a fear of spiders or lifts). Agoraphobia, or fear of open spaces or public places, is more complex and can develop into panic attacks and restrict the lives of sufferers and prevent them from leaving home, sometimes for years.

**Generalised anxiety disorder** is suffered by people with constant anxiety, persistent life distress, exaggerated pessimism and symptoms that impair their quality of life such as palpitations, headache, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, chest pain, digestive discomfort or a fear of falling ill. These symptoms usually last for more than 6 months.

All these situations have **effective treatments** that should be started as soon as possible. The following are recommended:

- **Identify what triggers the stress.**
- **Make small changes in the rhythm of life.**
- **Keep to healthy habits** (taking care of [diet](#), [resting properly at night](#), doing [physical exercise](#), [keeping active](#) and [taking care of self-esteem](#)).
- **Reduce environmental demands.**
- **Share and voice concerns.**
- **Use [meditation](#) and [relaxation](#) techniques.**
- **Do rewarding activities.**



If these changes are hard to make and you do not notice an improvement in your state of mind, you should visit your doctor, who may recommend a course of psychotherapy or medication.