

Signs of Anxiety and Stress

If you answer **yes** to one or more of the following questions then you may well be suffering from stress or anxiety:

- Are you deeply uncomfortable in enclosed or crowded spaces e.g. the supermarket, cars, or the elevator?
- Do you get very tense or uneasy in situations that would not have bothered you much in the past?
- Have you struggled with intrusive thoughts, images or impulses that won't seem to go away or stop?
- Do you fear driving over bridges, being stuck in traffic or at red lights?
- Have you felt irritable, restless or agitated most of the time, for a substantial period of time?
- Do you experience intense, apparently inexplicable fears of people, places or things?
- Do you feel the need to repeat certain behaviors and don't really know why?
- Are you afraid of losing control?
- Do you spend a lot of the time wishing the world seemed safer, or avoiding activities because you are uncertain?

10 Early Warning Signs of Panic Attacks

Knowing the early warning signs of a panic attack can help you avoid it or get to a place that feels safer for you. Here are ten early warning symptoms of a panic attack:

- Overwhelming fear you may be losing control, even going crazy
- A racing heart with tingling sensations
- Obsessive worries or unwanted, intense thoughts
- Dizziness or nausea leading to panic
- Chills, hot flushes or the sweats followed by waves of anxiety
- Trembling or shaking
- Unexplained weakness or numbness in parts of your body
- Tightness in the throat or chest and shortness of breath
- Feelings of disconnection from what is going on in your body and/or environment
- The sense that anxiety may push you beyond what you can take

If you've had a few of these anxiety symptoms at some point, no matter how long ago, then you were probably having an anxiety attack (take this panic attack test). Panic attacks often become a source of fear and worry. You may even begin to obsess over them and experience anticipatory anxiety if you aren't recognizing and dealing with all your symptoms.

Remember that anxiety can present itself in many ways depending on the individual and their circumstances. So the more you know about what stress looks like for you, the more effectively you can target and treat anxiety.

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Treat Anxiety with Grounding Skills

If you want to stop feeling "spacey," or you feel yourself slipping into the spiral of anxiety, try some of these helpful anxiety management techniques:

1. Bring up today's newspaper on the web, notice the date. Read something fun!
2. Breathe slowly and steadily from your core. Imagine letting fear and worry go, evaporating along with each breath.
3. Trace your hands against the physical outline of your body. Experience your own presence in the world.
4. Call a friend and have a chat.
5. If you are feeling 'stuck', change how you're positioned. Wiggle your fingers, tap your feet. Pay attention to the movement: You are in control of what your body is doing, right here and now.
6. Eat or drink something. Is it hot, or cold? Sweet, or sour?
7. Meditate, if that's OK for you. Otherwise use distractions like television or music to help settle down.
8. Use your voice. Say your name or pick up a book and read the first paragraph you find out loud.
9. Look at yourself in the mirror. Smile, even if that's the last thing you feel like! How does that feel? What can you see? (If negative thoughts come to mind, write them down to look at later but let them go for now. You're anxious enough as it is.)
10. Write out what's going on. Keep writing until you start to notice it makes a difference, lets some of the things you're anxious about out.
11. Take a shower/bath. Notice the sensations of the water.
12. Write somebody you care about an email.
13. Imagine yourself in a familiar, comfortable place. Feel the safety. Know it.
14. Take a look outside. Count the number of trees and street signs.
15. Exercise. Jump up and down on the spot. Try some gentle yoga, or ride a bike.
16. Hold onto something comforting. Maybe a blanket or an old stuffed toy.
17. Laugh. Even if that's hard. Just the act of laughing about something, anything can break that spinning out of control feeling.
18. When you're not too stressed, make a list of the things that provoke your anxiety. Take it to your therapist and ask them to help you find ways to desensitize you to some of those things. Then those triggers won't be quite so powerful, and your anxiety coping skills will work better.
19. If you get PTSD flashbacks, when you're feeling OK, make a list of the furniture in your home and what room it's in. Give the list to a friend you can call to help you focus on what's now and safe.
20. List 5 really positive things in your life. Put the list where you'll see it and remember that there's more to the world than just panic and fear.
21. Think about the last week. Was there a day you didn't have so much anxiety? Remember how it felt to be less anxious than you are right now. What was different? What can change?

Once you've found which techniques help, make a list to put on your wall, or carry in your pocket.