



# States of Anxiety

What is a state of anxiety?



**Anxiety is a "natural" feeling that can be experienced in dangerous situations. The worries, fears and anxiety felt by everyone are simply an expression of the body's desire to protect the individual.**

When anxiety is triggered by situations that are not currently or objectively dangerous, and becomes too great or even disabling, it becomes pathological. This is referred to as an emotional disorder, with excessive, persistent anxiety that seriously affects quality of life.

Anxiety-related disorders encompass a range of symptoms that manifest themselves in very different ways. They include acute panic attacks, phobias, generalised anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In industrialised countries, 25% of 18-65 year-olds will suffer from an anxiety-related disorder at some point in their lives. Women are twice as likely as men to suffer from anxiety disorders.

## The symptoms

Symptoms can vary from person to person.

### Physical symptoms :

- heart palpitations and/or chest pains.
- sweating (clammy hands, hot flushes).
- trembling.
- shortness of breath, choking and dry mouth.
- hyperventilation, which may lead to nausea, dizziness or lightheadedness.
- tingling or numbness in the limbs.
- psycho-functional disorders: diarrhoea, pollakiuria, sleep disorders, etc.

### Cognition :

- repetitive questions.
- uncertainty.
- difficulty concentrating.
- memory problems.



### Behaviour :

agitation.

addictive behaviour (alcohol, drug abuse, deviant acts, smoking, unhealthy r  
food)

sexual inhibition (anorgasmia, nymphomania, feelings of displeasure)



### Emotions :

- feelings of fear, anxiety, panic or unease.
- sensation of instability.

## Causes and risk factors

If you suffer from several of the above symptoms over a period of 6 months or more, it is important to rule out a medical condition (angina pectoris, heart rhythm disorder, thyroid disorder, temporal epileptic seizure, etc).

There are a number of risk factors for anxiety states. It is clear, however, that it is impossible to isolate a single risk factor that would, on its own, be predictive of the onset of the disorder. Instead, vulnerability results from the interaction of several risk factors. It is triggered by the combination and sum of biological, behavioural, environmental and psychological factors.

### **Risk factors**

#### Biological :

- Some health problems, such as respiratory illnesses or hyperthyroidism.
- A biological vulnerability to stress, which makes the person naturally more fragile and more prone to stress.

#### Behavioural :

- Abuse or consumption (even just once) of some substances such as caffeine or some stimulant drugs such as cocaine.
- Deprivation of caffeine, drugs or alcohol, in the case of a person going through withdrawal..

#### Environnemental :

- Life events (linked to the family, social or professional environment).
- A traumatic event (such as a natural disaster).
- Family history of affective disorders.

#### Psychological:

- the personality of the person, who may, for example, have low self-esteem or difficulty adapting to different life situations.



## How can anxiety be prevented?

Moderate anxiety triggered by danger is a normal reaction, so preventive measures are aimed more at preventing temporary anxiety from becoming permanent.

A healthy lifestyle can seriously reduce anxiety to a normal level.

- A good balance between work, rest and leisure.
- Low consumption of caffeine, alcohol and nicotine, combined with a healthy diet.
- Worries that are not expressed quickly tend to become difficult to bear. Talking is therefore an excellent way of relieving anxious feelings. Don't hesitate to talk to someone close to you.
- Regular exercise, because physical activity fights stress, relaxes, changes your mind and eliminates physical tension.
- If the anxiety persists, consult your GP or even a psychiatrist.

During moments of anxiety, you won't always have a psychologist or a friend by your side to listen to you. So it's important to have a few tools at your disposal to help you get through those anxious moments. Relaxing, writing, breathing, distracting yourself by listening to music, drawing or other activities are tools that will help you to limit the intensity of anxiety at any given moment.

## Treatments

Treatments can vary from person to person.

Some people will need psychiatric treatment with pharmacotherapeutic support.

Others will use various forms of psychotherapy (cognitive behavioural therapy, brief solution-focused therapy, psychoanalytic therapy, systemic therapy, etc.).

Others will feel more helped by complementary approaches such as relaxation, support and self-help groups or bibliotherapy.