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DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PANIC ATTACK AND AN ANXIETY ATTACK

K. Sagar*¹ and B. Ashwini²

¹*Mental Health Nursing, Arun College of Nursing, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India.

²Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India.

ABSTRACT

An anxiety attack occurs in response to certain stressors and can develop gradually, while panic attacks can occur unexpectedly and suddenly. Panic attacks and anxiety attacks can both indicate an underlying health condition that you may hear people talking about. But they are different conditions. Read on to learn more about the differences between panic attacks and anxiety.

KEYWORDS

Anxiety attack and Panic Attack.

Author for Correspondence:

Sagar K,
Department of Mental Health Nursing,
Arun College of Nursing,
No.15. Thiyagarajapuram,
Vellore, Tamilnadu, India.

Email: rajisag@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

What is an anxiety attack?

In the 5th edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5 does not denote anxiety attacks, but it defines anxiety as a feature of many common mental disorders

This includes the following conditions,

Generalized anxiety disorder

Panic disorder

Separation anxiety disorder

Agoraphobia without history of panic disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Social anxiety disorder

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Specific phobia

Anxiety is usually related to the anticipation of a stressful situation, experience, or event. It may come gradually symptoms of anxiety include:

Worry
Distress
Fear

Because there is no diagnostic recognition of anxiety attacks, signs and symptoms are open to interpretation. That is a person may describe having an “anxiety attack” and have symptoms that another person has never experienced despite indicating that they, too, have had an “anxiety attack.”

What is a panic attack?

Panic attacks come on suddenly and involve intense and often overwhelming fear. They’re accompanied by very challenging physical symptoms, like a racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, or nausea.

DSM-5 recognizes panic attacks and categorizes them as unexpected or expected.

Unexpected panic attacks occur without an obvious cause. Expected panic attacks are cued by external stressors, like phobias.

Panic attacks can happen to anyone, but having more than one may be a sign of panic disorder, a mental health condition characterized by sudden and repeated panic attacks.

The condition of panic attack can include,
Heightened vigilance for danger and physical symptoms

Anxious and irrational thinking

A strong feeling of dread, danger or foreboding

Fear of going mad, losing control, or dying

Feeling lightheaded and dizzy

Tingling and chills, particularly in the arms and hands

Trembling or shaking, sweating

Hot flushes

Accelerated heart rate

A feeling of constriction in the chest

Breathing difficulties, including shortness of breath

Nausea or abdominal distress

Tense muscles

Dry mouth

Feelings of unreality and detachment from the environment.

Symptoms of panic attack vs. anxiety attack

Panic and anxiety attacks may feel similar and they share a lot of emotional and physical symptoms. You

can experience both an anxiety and a panic attack at the same time. For instance, you might experience anxiety while worrying about a potentially stressful situation, like an important presentation at work. When the situation arrives, anxiety may culminate in a panic attack.

A panic attack or anxiety attack can both cause physical and emotional symptoms, including:

Apprehension and worry

Distress

Fear of dying or losing control

A sense of detachment from the world (derealisation) or oneself (depersonalization)

Heart palpitations or an accelerated heart rate

Chest pain

Shortness of breath

Tightness in the throat or feeling like you’re choking

Dry mouth

Sweating

Chills or hot flashes

Trembling or shaking

Numbness or tingling (paresthesia)

Nausea, abdominal pain, or upset stomach

Headache

Feeling faint or dizzy

It may be difficult to know whether what you’re experiencing is anxiety or a panic attack. Keep in mind the following:

The cause

Anxiety is typically related to something that’s perceived as stressful or threatening. Panic attacks aren’t always cued by stressors. They occurs out of the blue.

The level of distress

Anxiety can be mild, moderate, or severe. For example, anxiety may be happening in the back of your mind as you go about your day-to-day activities. Panic attacks, on the other hand, mostly involve severe, disruptive symptoms.

Fight-or-flight

During a panic attack, the body’s autonomous fight-or-flight response takes over. Physical symptoms are often more intense than symptoms of anxiety.

Speed of onset

While anxiety can build gradually, panic attacks usually come on abruptly.

Effect: Panic attacks typically trigger worries or fears related to having another attack. This may have an effect on your behaviour, leading you to avoid places or situations where you think you might be at risk of a panic attack.

Causes of panic attack vs. anxiety attack

Unexpected panic attacks have no clear external triggers. Expected panic attacks and anxiety can be triggered by similar things. Some common triggers include:

A stressful job

Driving

Social situations

Phobias, like agoraphobia (fear of crowded or open spaces), claustrophobia (fear of small spaces) and acrophobia (fear of heights)

Reminders or memories of traumatic experiences

Chronic illnesses, like heart disease, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, or asthma

Chronic pain

Withdrawal from drugs or alcohol

Caffeine

Medication and supplements

Thyroid problems

Risk factors for panic attack vs. anxiety attack

Anxiety and panic attacks have similar risk factors. These include,

Experiencing trauma or witnessing traumatic events, either as a child or as an adult

Experiencing a stressful life event, like the death of a loved one or a divorce

Experiencing ongoing stress and worries, like work responsibilities, conflict in your family, or financial woes

Living with a chronic health condition or life threatening illness

Having an anxious personality

Having another mental health condition like depression

Having close family members who also have anxiety or panic disorders

Using drugs or consuming alcohol

Diagnosing panic attack vs. anxiety attack

Anxiety attacks can be diagnosed by

Anxiety symptoms

Anxiety disorders

Panic attacks

Panic disorders

A mental health expert will ask you about your symptoms and conduct tests to rule out other health conditions with similar symptoms, like heart disease or thyroid problems.

To get a diagnosis the following examination will be done,

A physical exam

Blood tests

A heart test, like an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)

A psychological evaluation or questionnaire

Treatment and medication for panic attack vs. anxiety attack

Here are some treatments they may help.

Counselling and psychotherapy

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

This type of therapy can help you see things that are troubling you in a new way. A counsellor can help you develop strategies to manage urges when they arise.

Cognitive therapy

It can help to identify, reframe and neutralize the unhelpful thoughts that often cause an anxiety disorder.

Exposure therapy

This type of therapy involves controlled exposure to situations that trigger fear and anxiety, which can help you to face those fears in a new way.

Relaxation techniques

This includes breathing exercises, guided imagery, progressive relaxation, biofeedback and autogenic training.

Medication

Antidepressants

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs).

Beta-blockers

Used for maintaining normal physical symptoms, like a rapid heart rate.

Anti-anxiety drugs

Benzodiazepines, a sedative medication that can suppress symptoms quickly.

All these drugs can have adverse effects. SSRIs and SNRIs are for long-term use, and it can take time to feel the effects. Benzodiazepines are for short-term use only, as there is a high risk of dependence.

Home remedies for panic attack vs. anxiety attack

If you feel an anxiety or panic attack coming on, try the following,

Take slow deep breaths: When you feel your breath quickening, focus your attention on each inhale and exhale. Feel your stomach fill with air as you inhale. Count down from four as you exhale. Repeat until your breathing slows.

Recognize and accept what you're experiencing

If you've already experienced an anxiety or panic attack, you know that it can be incredibly challenging. Remind yourself that the symptoms will pass and you'll be alright.

Practice mindfulness

Mindfulness-based interventions are increasingly used to treat anxiety and panic disorders. Mindfulness is a technique that can help you ground your thoughts in the present. You can practice mindfulness by actively observing thoughts and sensations without reacting to them.

Use relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques include guided imagery, aromatherapy and muscle relaxation. If you're experiencing symptoms of anxiety or a panic attack, try doing things that you find relaxing. Close your eyes, take a bath, or use lavender, which has relaxing effects.

Lifestyle changes

The following lifestyle changes can help you prevent anxiety and panic attacks, as well as reduces the severity of symptoms when an attack occurs, Reduce and manage sources of stress in your life.

Learn how to identify and stop negative thoughts.

Get regular, moderate exercise.

Practice meditation or yoga.

Eat a balanced diet.

Join a support group for people with anxiety or panic attacks.

Limit your consumption of alcohol and caffeine as well as the use of drugs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Panic attacks and anxiety attacks are not the same. Though these terms are often used interchangeably, only panic attacks are identified in the DSM-5. Anxiety and panic attacks have similar symptoms, causes, and risk factors. But panic attacks tend to be more intense and are often accompanied by more severe physical symptoms. You should contact a healthcare professional if anxiety- or panic-related symptoms are affecting your everyday life.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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