



Mosaic Counseling

Employee Assistance Program

MOSAIC MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

THE OFFICIAL EAP NEWSLETTER FROM MOSAIC COUNSELING

PANIC ATTACK VS. ANXIETY ATTACK: 6 THINGS TO KNOW

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[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/Z3P2XXES](https://tinyurl.com/z3p2xxes)

Feelings of fear, dread, or unease can be paralyzing. Identifying your symptoms — and knowing help is available — is key to recovery.

When you feel a sudden rush of nerves or high emotion, it's likely that your body responds in turn. Sweating, shakiness, or feelings of nausea, among other things, might occur. Such discomfort, particularly if the sensations are new, could prompt a person to ask: *Am I experiencing a panic attack? Or is it an anxiety attack?* But that's not quite the right question. It's likely you're experiencing *either* anxiety or a panic attack. "They're very different emotional conditions," says Ricks Warren, Ph.D., a clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Michigan.

Anxiety is a condition defined as excessive, persisting worry over an imminent event such as death or illness, or even minor events such as being late for an appointment or other uncertain outcomes. Symptoms include fatigue, hypervigilance, restlessness, and irritability — and are often chronic.

Panic attacks, on the other hand, are short bursts of intense fear often marked by increased heart rate, brief chest pain or shortness of breath. Typically lasting fewer than 30 minutes, they could occur once or repeatedly — sometimes without reason. These episodes can send patients to the emergency room, as they are sometimes mistaken for a heart attack. Warren explains more below.

What is the difference between a panic attack and anxiety?

Warren: Anxiety is basically what we experience when we are worrying about some future event — anticipating a bad outcome that might happen. It's often involved with muscle tension and a general feeling of uneasiness. And it usually comes on gradually.

A panic attack is different. It's associated with a very abrupt onset of intense fear because of a sense of threat happening *right now*, the fight-or-flight response that we're hardwired to have in order to deal with immediate danger. It sets off that alarm.



When might one or the other occur?

Warren: So if you're walking down a dark alley, you are probably thinking that there could be potential danger; that anxiety of anticipation, the feeling in your stomach, the elevated heart rate. But if you're walking down that alley and somebody jumps out with a knife, then you're likely to have a panic attack — an overwhelming urge to escape a situation that is dangerous.

Panic attacks also can be triggered by subtler cues, like certain bodily sensations. A person could have a pain in the chest and interpret that as a heart attack. Or they feel lightheaded and think they're having a stroke.

Page 1

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