



ANXIETY DISORDERS

AGORAPHOBIA

What it is:

Agoraphobia is defined as a fear of being in open or public spaces. This can include the fear of using public transportation, being in enclosed spaces or being outside of the home alone. The fear and anxiety caused by such situations is typically due to the individual believing that something terrible will happen in this setting. They may also feel that escape from such situations is impossible, for example feeling “there is no one to help me here” or “there is no way to get out of here”. The fear and anxiety is always out of proportion to the actual degree of threat or danger present in the situation or environment.

The amount of anxiety experienced may vary depending on the proximity of the feared situation, and on whether the situation is anticipated or being currently experienced. Typically individuals with this disorder will actively avoid a situation which causes them anxiety. This may greatly affect their functionality in daily life, and may become so severe that the individual becomes completely homebound.

Common symptoms:

Intense fear and anxiety regarding two (or more) of the following scenarios:

1. Using public transport, for example buses, planes or ships
2. Being in open spaces, for example parking lots, parks, bridges
3. Being in enclosed spaces, for example shops, movies
4. Standing in line or being part of a crowd
5. Being outside of the home alone
6. The individual fears or actively tries to avoid these situations because they fear that if something bad were to happen in such an environment, there would not be help or escape available
7. These situations are actively avoided, or the individual needs to be accompanied by a companion
8. Fear and avoidance of these situations causes impairments in the individual’s ability to function daily



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Causes:

There are a number of risk factors that can contribute to an individual developing agoraphobia. Negative affectivity and anxiety sensitivity are closely linked to agoraphobia, but they are also linked to most types of anxiety disorders. Negative events in childhood, such as the death of a parent, or other traumatic events such as being attacked, may also lead to the disorders development. Growing up in an overprotective home may also be a risk factor. Agoraphobia also has a strong hereditary component.

Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*