

Stress vs. Anxiety: What's the Difference?

Stress

Anxiety

Origin/Cause

- External cause (financial trouble, marital problems, job loss, fight with a friend, etc.)
- Usually diminishes after the external concern has subsided or a problem is resolved

- Internal origin
- Persistent feeling of apprehension or dread in nonthreatening situations
- Does not go away after the concern has passed
- Develops from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events

Symptoms

- Emotional: Anxiety, fear, irritability, anger, resentment, loss of confidence
- Cognitive: Difficulty making decisions, confusion, repetitive thoughts
- Physical: Dry mouth, tremors, sweatiness, pounding or racing heartbeat, chest tightness, difficulty breathing, muscle tension, headache, dizziness
- Behavioral: Loss of sleep, nervous habits (eating too much or too little, nail biting, drinking more coffee or alcohol than usual, etc.)

- Produces all of the symptoms seen under stress/chronic stress, but also panic attacks, which mimic heart attack symptoms (chest pain, sweating, feeling faint, nausea, chills, breathing difficulties)
- Symptoms happen suddenly and peak within 10 minutes (to be safe, never hesitate to call 911)
- Symptoms often interfere with school work, job performance and relationships

What it can lead to

- Untreated chronic stress can result in serious health conditions including anxiety, insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system
- Stress can contribute to the development of major illnesses, such as heart disease, depression and obesity

- When symptoms persist, anxiety can be diagnosed as an anxiety disorder (Examples: generalized anxiety, panic disorder, social anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder etc.)
- People with anxiety disorders are six times more likely to be hospitalized for psychiatric disorders
- Twice the risk for heart disease

What to do/Treatment

- Find ways to manage stress such as physical activity, breathing exercises, adequate sleep and taking time to connect with others
- List stressful situations and how you feel when they occur, then develop strategies for preventing or diffusing these situations

- Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet only 36.9% of those suffering receive treatment
- Standard treatments include: therapy, medication, complementary alternative treatment, and Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation

Best Advice

Whether you are living with chronic stress or think you have an anxiety disorder, you will likely benefit from seeing a licensed mental health professional.