

Are you afraid you might have agoraphobia?

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Agoraphobia (ag-uh-ruh-FOE-be-uh) is a type of anxiety disorder in which you fear and avoid places or situations that might cause you to panic and make you feel trapped, helpless or embarrassed. You fear an actual or anticipated situation, such as using public transportation, being in open or enclosed spaces, standing in line, or being in a crowd.

The anxiety is caused by fear that there's no easy way to escape or get help if the anxiety intensifies. Most people who have [agoraphobia](#) develop it after having one or more [panic attacks](#), causing them to worry about having another attack and avoid the places where it may happen again.

People with agoraphobia often have a hard time feeling safe in any public place, especially where crowds gather. You may feel that you need a companion, such as a relative or friend, to go with you to public places. The fear can be so overwhelming that you may feel unable to leave your home.

Agoraphobia treatment can be challenging because it usually means confronting your fears. But with psychotherapy and medications, you can escape the trap of agoraphobia and live a more enjoyable life.

Typical agoraphobia symptoms include fear of:

- Leaving home alone
- Crowds or waiting in line
- Enclosed spaces, such as movie theaters, elevators or small stores
- Open spaces, such as parking lots, bridges or malls
- Using public transportation, such as a bus, plane or train
- These situations cause anxiety because you fear you won't be able to escape or find help if you start to feel panicked or have other disabling or embarrassing symptoms.

In addition:

- Fear or anxiety almost always results from exposure to the situation
- Your fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual danger of

the situation

- You avoid the situation, you need a companion to go with you, or you endure the situation but are extremely distressed
- You experience significant distress or problems with [social situations](#), work or other areas in your life because of the fear, anxiety or avoidance
- Your phobia and avoidance usually lasts six months or longer

Panic Disorder And Agoraphobia

Some people have a [panic disorder](#) in addition to agoraphobia. Panic disorder is a type of [anxiety](#) disorder in which you experience sudden attacks of extreme [fear](#) that reach a peak within a few minutes and trigger intense physical symptoms (panic attacks). You might think that you're totally losing control, having a heart attack or even dying.

Fear of another panic attack can lead to avoiding similar circumstances or the place where it occurred in an attempt to prevent future panic attacks.

Signs and symptoms of a [panic](#) attack can include:

- Rapid heart rate
- Trouble breathing or a feeling of choking
- Chest pain or pressure
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Feeling shaky, numb or tingling
- Excessive sweating
- Sudden flushing or chills
- Upset stomach or diarrhea
- Feeling a loss of control
- Fear of dying

When To See A Health Care Provider

Agoraphobia can severely limit your ability to socialize, work, attend important events and even manage the details of daily life, such as running errands.

Don't let agoraphobia make your world smaller. Call your doctor if you have signs or symptoms listed above.

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