

# AGORAPHOBIA

SOURCES: NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH, AGORAPHOBIA INSIGHT WEBSITE

## What is agoraphobia?

From looking at the definition in a dictionary, a person would get the impression that agoraphobia is only the fear of being in open places, but this is misleading. More commonly, agoraphobia is the fear of going places where escaping will be difficult if a panic or anxiety attack should occur.

When people with agoraphobia fear going to places where it might be hard to flee if they have a panic attack, this often leads people to be confined to their home (safe zone).

Agoraphobia sufferers often avoid going to crowded stores or travelling. They do not go far from home and often depend on family members or friends for their needs.

If agoraphobia sufferers should venture to places that they fear, they will usually have a 'safe person' (a friend, family member, or spouse) accompany them so they feel self-assured and safe. Some cases of agoraphobia might not be as severe as others. Some people might be able to function normally but by concealing their fear, and others are confined to their home. The nature of this anxiety disorder keeps many agoraphobia sufferers from being able to seek treatment.

## Causes, incidence, risk factors

Panic and anxiety attacks go hand-and-hand with agoraphobia. If you have some of the symptoms listed, it does not necessarily mean you have agoraphobia. Call for an appointment with your health care provider if symptoms suggestive of agoraphobia develop.

People who have panic disorder, then later develop agoraphobia, have been conditioned to fear. In the case of agoraphobia, it is the fear of having a panic attack somewhere that they will not be able to escape.

If agoraphobic does occur with panic disorder, the onset is usually during the late 20s, and women are affected more often than men. People with this disorder may become house bound for years, which is likely to hurt social and interpersonal relationships.

## Common symptoms

- Fear of being alone
- Fear of losing control in a public space
- Fear of being in places where escape might be difficult
- Becoming house bound for prolonged periods
- Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others
- Feelings of helplessness
- Feeling that the body is unreal
- Feeling that the environment is unreal
- Confused or distorted thoughts
- Intense fear of going crazy
- Intense fear of dying
- Anxiety or panic attack (acute severe anxiety)

## Symptoms of a panic or anxiety attack

- Chest pain
- Light-headedness
- Dizziness
- Shaking



- Sweating
- Trouble breathing
- Skin flushing
- Unusual temper or agitation with trembling or twitching Heartbeat sensations
- Nausea and vomiting
- Numbness and tingling
- Abdominal distress that occurs when upset

## Common situations associated with agoraphobia

- Being in line at a store
- Travelling
- Shopping
- Being alone
- Being in crowds

## Treatment

- **Medication:** Antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications are used to treat the symptoms of agoraphobia. Commonly used prescription drugs include Xanax and Celexa.
- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy:** CBT is a form of psychotherapy where undesired thoughts are replaced with desired ones. This form of therapy is very effective when used with medication.

## Helpful reading

- **Anatomy of the Spirit** by Caroline Myss
- **Embracing The Fear: Learning to Manage Fear and Panic Attacks** by Judith Bemis-Amr
- *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* by Susan Jeffers, PhD

- *Agoraphobia and Panic: A Guide to Psychological Treatment* by Jeffrey E. Hecken
- *Constructing Panic: The Discourse of Agoraphobia* by Lisa Capps
- *Free From Fears* by Ann Seagrave
- *From Panic to Peace of Mind: Overcoming Panic and Agoraphobia* by C.B. Scrignar
- *How To Help Your Loved One Recover from Agoraphobia* by Karen P. Williams
- *Life Isn't Just A Panic: Stories of Hope by Recovering Agoraphobics* by Anita L. Pace Panic Buster,
- *Learn to Conquer Panic Attacks and Agoraphobia* by Bonnie Crandall
- *Treating Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia: A Step-By-Step Clinical Guide* by Elke Zuercher-White, PhD
- *Agoraphobia: A Clinical and Personal Account* by J.C. Clarke
- *Agoraphobia: Are Panic Attacks Psychological or Physical?* By Adele Paolino
- *Agoraphobia: Panic and the Lonely #353* by Anne D' Arey Jorgensen
- *Fearless People: Planning Your Recovery From Agoraphobia* by Judith L. Marquart, PhD
- *Fears, Phobias, and Panic: A Self-Help Guide to Agoraphobia* by Maureen Scheehan
- *The House Without The Door: A Study of Emily Dickinson and the Illness of Agoraphobia* by Maryanne M. Garbowsky
- *Managing Your Anxiety* by Christopher J. McCullough and Robert Woods Mann
- *Prison By The Sea* by Nancy J. Sanborn





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