

Anxiety, Transitions, and Expectations

What does Anxiety look and feel like?

The signs and symptoms of anxiety are the same in people with and without disabilities. **Physical symptoms**, such as a pounding heart, upset stomach, headache, fatigue, and changes in blood pressure may be present. **Behavioral and emotional symptoms** may include feeling depressed, restless, having difficulty concentrating, having a panic attack, feeling agitated, worried, or having irrational fear.

How anxiety is different for people with I/DD:

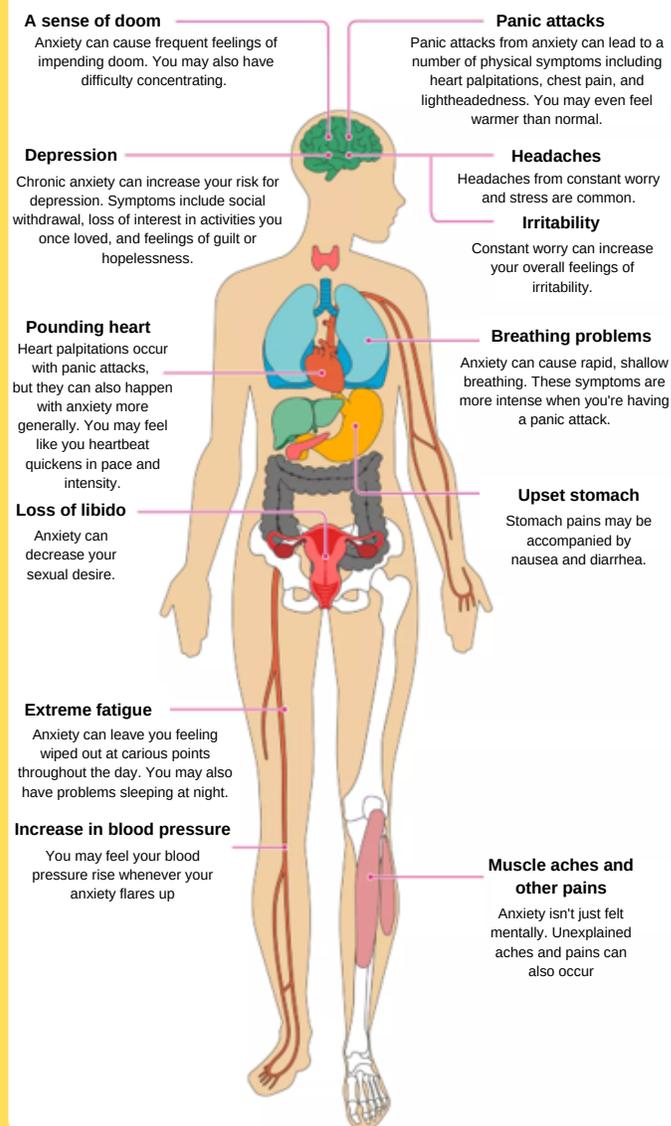
Though people with intellectual/developmental disabilities experience the same signs and symptoms of anxiety we all do, how they cope with it and how others perceive their behaviors may be different. It is an unfortunate truth that many times people with I/DD are pigeon-holed into their diagnosis, and any behaviors or emotions they display are thought to be just a part of this diagnosis. This, of course, is not true. People with I/DD **can and do** have anxiety just like everyone else. The differences may come in how people with I/DD display and handle these emotions. If you do **NOT** have a disability, you can often work through your anxiety by:

- Knowing how you feel and telling someone in a socially acceptable way.
- Putting things into perspective.
- Recognizing how others are coping and understanding what's going on.
- Being able to "guess" what could happen next, and knowing that if something goes wrong, you can think of a way out.

If you have a disability, you may lack some of these coping and communication skills, and be overwhelmed by:

- Too much sensory input.
- Being confused by what people say or do.
- Having poor short-term memory.
- Experiencing frustration over not being able to identify your feelings and communicate them to others.

HOW ANXIETY EFFECTS THE BODY



How to mitigate anxiety:

If you or someone you care for are experiencing anxiety, you can try these strategies to help:

- Minimize surprises by following the same structures and routines each day, and give people fair warning about transitions.
- Communicate with short sentences. One. Thing. At. A. Time.
- Manage the sensory environment (limit lights, noises, movement, play soothing music, offer tactile stress toys, etc.)
- Give choices and a safe space. Unless it is an emergency, there are no "musts" in life.

Compiled by Suzanne Byers, Life Skills Supervisor