

# Anxiety & Yoga Introduction



## Lesson Overview

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In this lesson, we explore terminology, symptoms and effects associated with anxiety, and general considerations for what may help.

### **Objective**

Become familiar with situational and chronic anxiety, research on the effect of yoga, and a general overview of tools that may support students experiencing anxiety symptoms.

### **Description**

Describe the difference between typical worry or situational anxiety and chronic anxiety. Define chronic anxiety and describe potential symptoms. Provide research showing that yoga reduces anxiety symptoms and name six tools you might consider.

## Terminology

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There are different levels of anxiety, ranging from an appropriate situational response to a dysfunctional condition. Anxiety about getting on a plane after a succession of airline crashes is not a disorder but a natural reaction to the environment. Deciding to never fly again is taking that anxiety to a level where it can interfere with your life. – Larry Payne PhD & Richard Usatine MD

### Natural Human Emotions

- Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. (Megan Cluett)
- Fear and anxiety are natural human emotions that serve the evolutionary purpose of alerting humans to danger. They are associated with sympathetic nervous system activation.
- Related attitudes and emotions that may be experienced as part of a natural response or be an aspect of a chronic disorder include agitation, apprehension, compulsiveness, dread, edginess, fear, horror, insecurity, nervousness, obsessiveness, panic, paranoia, phobia, terror, uneasiness and wariness. (Gary Kraftsow)
- The stress response is a normal, healthy reaction to fear. Problems arise when the fight-or-flight response remains chronically activated. For much more, see Stress & Relaxation Response.

### Chronic Anxiety

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- Chronic anxiety is a serious mental illness and is experienced as worry and fear that can be overwhelming and disabling.
- “Generalized anxiety disorder” is one potential diagnosis among several anxiety-related manifestations. It refers to excessive worry for at least six months plus other symptoms such as restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability and/or sleep disturbance. (Yoga RX)

- There are other chronic anxiety-related manifestations that are labeled differently and include panic disorders and PTSD.

## Potential Symptoms & Effects

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Ram Rao, PhD notes that symptoms of chronic anxiety may include:

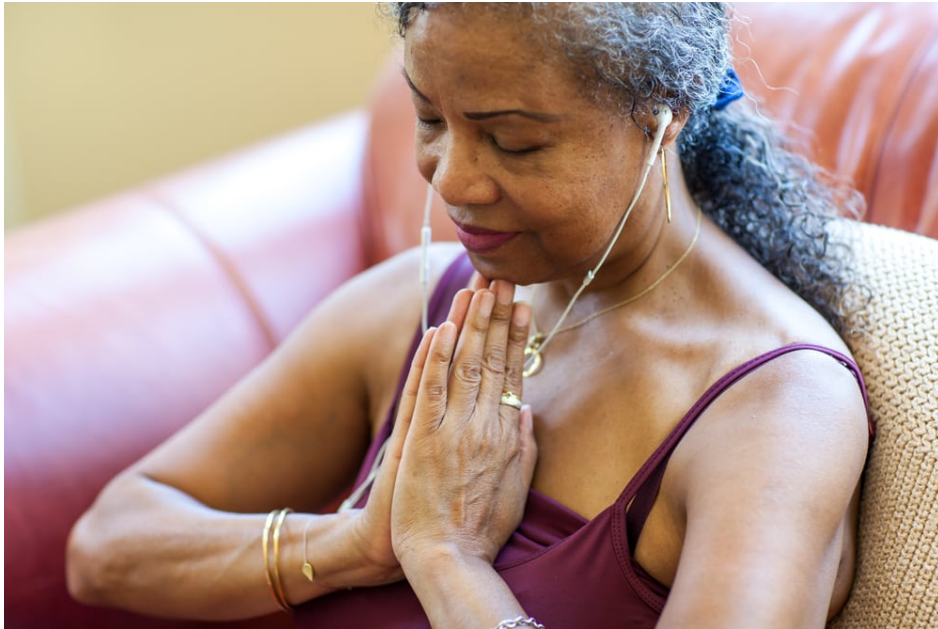
- Feelings of panic, fear and uneasiness
- Problems sleeping
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Not being able to be still and calm
- Muscle tension

Gary Kraftsow explains that since strong states of anxiety trigger the fight-or-flight response, some symptoms may be:

- Sweating
- Accelerated heartbeat
- Tightness in the belly
- Muscle tension
- Shakiness of the limbs
- Inability to be still or to concentrate
- Shortness of breath
- Insomnia

## What May Help: Overview

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### Meet Students Where They Are

In most cases of (*rajasic*) anxiety, you will want to start with brisk activity before making any attempt to bring balance through slower practices.

First create a level of physical activity equal to the level of bodily stimulation generated by mental anxiety... Gradually slow the movement down and introduce deep, slow breathing. – **Gary Kraftsow**

### YOGA PRACTICES CAN WORK WITHOUT MENTAL PROCESSING

You don't need to understand or even process your thoughts or emotions in order to experience dramatic shifts in mood, behavior, and well-being. – **Bo Forbes PsyD**

### Overview of Tools

Research has shown that yoga reduces symptoms of anxiety. Here are some tools for consideration.

1. Breathing Practices
2. Present Moment Awareness
3. Yoga Philosophy and/or Spiritual Practices
4. Asana
5. Mantra / Sound
6. Mindfulness Meditation

In this Yoga Psychology Level 1 course we will look at all tools and techniques

This lesson provides an introduction and bird's eye view of Yoga and Anxiety. Continue with the Mental Health lessons in this series to explore in-depth how these techniques can be of help with mental health in general and with anxiety.