
How to Quickly Screen for Common Anxiety Disorders on the Inpatient Unit Fact Sheet

Many patients that you will admit to the hospital have significant anxiety. Often this is anxiety related to depression or psychosis, but sometimes this is an actual anxiety disorder. In this fact sheet, we discuss an efficient and rapid method for screening and making a provisional diagnosis of an anxiety disorder.

Diagnostic criteria in brief for the major anxiety disorders

- Generalized anxiety disorder (6 months of worry plus 3/6 of following: insomnia, fatigue, irritability, restlessness, poor concentration, muscle tension.)
- Panic disorder (recurrent panic attacks plus 1 month of worrying about a recurrence or showing a change in behavior to avoid an attack.)
- Social anxiety disorder (persistent fear of social situations, avoidance due to anxiety)
- Obsessive compulsive disorder (presence of obsessions and/or compulsions that are time-consuming and cause significant distress or impairment)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (exposure to traumatic event, presence of intrusion symptoms, avoidance of trauma-related stimuli, negative alterations in cognition or mood, and marked alterations in arousal and reactivity)
- Simple phobia (excessive fear or anxiety about a specific object or situation, which is avoided or endured with intense anxiety.)

What to ask to establish diagnoses

Stimulants are likely to destabilize major psychiatric syndromes that led to admission, such as bipolar disorder, psychosis, agitation. Begin with a high yield screening question related to each potential diagnosis; follow up with more specific questions as needed.

GAD

- Screening question: *Are you a person who worries almost all the time about all kinds of different things?*
- Follow up questions: *What do you worry about? Have you felt tense, restless or irritable for the past 6 months? Do you have trouble sleeping and feeling fatigued during the day? Is your concentration affected?*

Panic disorder

- Screening question: *Have you ever had a panic or anxiety attack?*
- Follow up questions: *What does it feel like when you have a panic attack? Do you worry about having another attack? Have you made any changes in your life to avoid these attacks?*

Social anxiety disorder

- Screening question: *Do you feel very anxious or uncomfortable in social situations?*
- Follow up questions: *Describe the anxiety you feel. Do you avoid these situations due to your anxiety?*

OCD

- Screening question: *Do you have obsessive compulsive disorder, where you have repetitive thoughts like worrying about germs, or repetitive behaviors like washing your hands over and over?*
- Follow up questions: *What are these thoughts or behaviors? How much time do you spend on these thoughts or behaviors in a day? Do they cause you distress or interfere with your life?*

PTSD

- Screening question: *Have you ever experienced or witnessed a very traumatic event?*
- Follow up questions: *Do you often think about this event when you don't want to? Do you avoid anything that reminds you of the event? Have you noticed any changes in your mood or behavior since the event?*

Simple phobia

- Screening question: *Do you have a strong fear of a specific object or situation?*
- Follow up questions: *What is the object or situation you fear? Do you avoid it? How does fear affect your daily life?*