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# Anxiety Disorders in Late Life

By: Anne Rosenthal, PhD, LMFT, CMC



# What is anxiety?

“A sense of disquiet, of disease, of the sands constantly shifting menacingly beneath your feet—where constant vigilance is the only hope of effectively protecting yourself.”

- Robert Sapolsky, PhD





## 93-year-old accused of killing wife, 90

By Henry K. Lee

A 93-year-old Foster City man has been named the oldest murder defendant in San Mateo County in at least three decades after being charged with stabbing his 90-year-old wife to death with a kitchen knife before trying to kill himself, authorities said Monday.

Wayne Bair is being held without bail at San Mateo County Jail in the slaying of his wife, Marie Bair.

Marie Bair was found dead on June 13 from stab wounds to her neck at the couple's home on the 200 block of Spinnaker Street.

Officers found Wayne Bair suffering from superficial stab wounds to his neck that appeared to be self-inflicted, police said. A large kitchen knife was recovered at the house, police said.

The husband was treated for his injuries at Stanford Medical Center before being transferred to jail.

Authorities are at a loss as to a motive in the case, said Karen Guidotti, chief deputy district attorney.

"There has been no substantiation of any medical issues. There is no known motive," Guidotti said.

Guidotti said Wayne Bair is the oldest person to face murder charges in the county in at least the past three decades.

"I can't remember in my time in the office anyone older than that," she said.

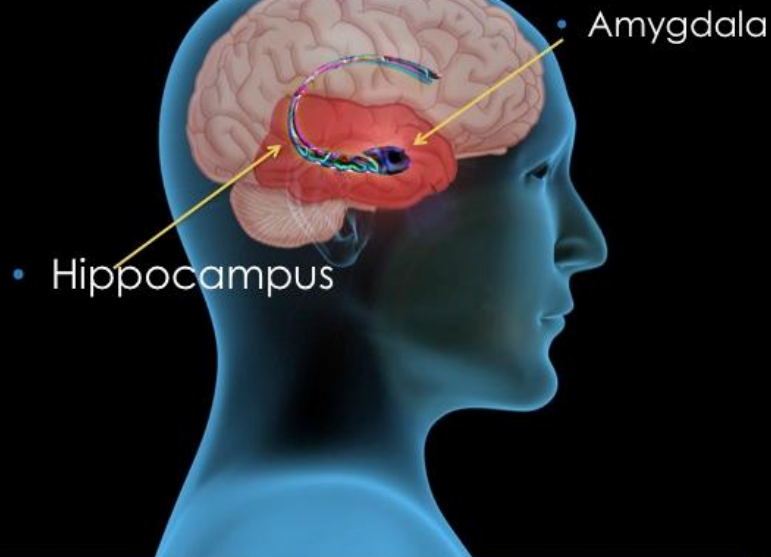
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Anxiety is rooted in cognitive distortion and can have dire consequences.

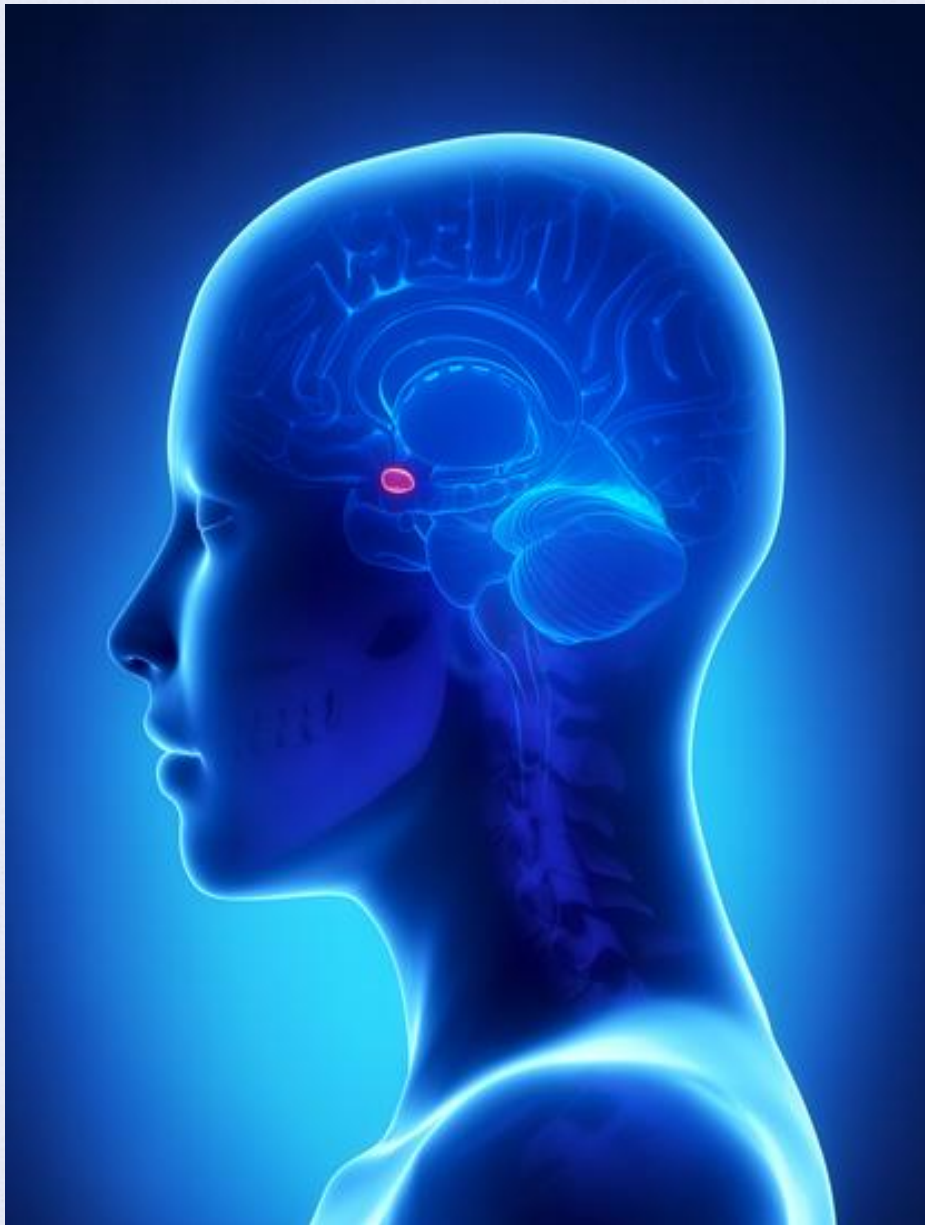
Anxiety disorders involve various regions of the brain. Primarily the hippocampus and amygdala.

## Amygdala & Hippocampus

Both involved in memory

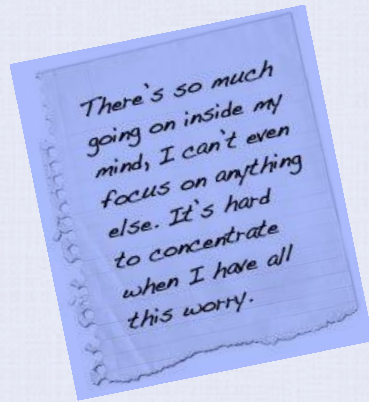






The amygdala  
is activated in  
response to  
anxiety.

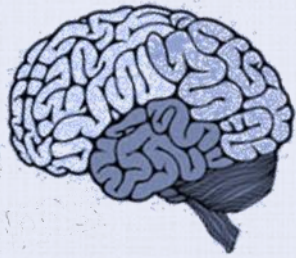




# GAD: General Anxiety Disorder

- Excessive worry (apprehensive expectation) occurring more days than not for at least six months, about a number of events or activities.
- The person finds it difficult to control the worry.





# General Anxiety Disorder

The anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms:

1. Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
2. Being easily fatigued
3. Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
4. Irritability
5. Muscle tension
6. Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless unsatisfying sleep)





# Panic Disorders or Panic Attack

Anxiety boils over with a paralyzing, hyperventilating sense of crisis that causes massive activation of the sympathetic nervous system. This occurs with a discrete period of intense fear or discomfort, in which four or more symptoms develop abruptly and reach a peak within ten minutes.



# Panic Disorder or Panic Attack Symptoms Include:

1. Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate
2. Sweating
3. Trembling or shaking
4. Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
5. Feeling of choking
6. Chest pain or discomfort
7. Nausea or abdominal distress



# Panic Disorder or Panic Attack Symptoms Include:

- 8. Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded or faint
- 9. DE realization (feelings of unreality) or depersonalization (being detached from oneself)
- 10. Fear of losing control or going crazy
- 11. Fear of dying
- 12. Paresthesia (numbness or tingling sensations)
- 13. Chills or hot flushes





# Agoraphobia and Other Phobias:

Focus on specific things. A subtype of anxiety disorder. Related to anxiety about being in places or situations from which escape might be difficult or embarrassing or in which help may not be available.



# Obsessive Compulsive Disorder



This disorder may be an obsession or compulsion; recurrent thoughts, images or impulses. The individual may understand their thoughts and actions are irrational; they cannot seem to stop them.



# Social Anxiety Disorder



PEOPLE ARE  
JUST PEOPLE,  
THEY SHOULDN'T  
MAKE YOU  
NERVOUS.

This disorder can render an individual unable to leave the house for fear of being judged by others.





# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present:

1. The person experienced, witnessed or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.
2. The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness or horror.



# Mixed Anxiety Disorder

Patients who suffer from Mixed Anxiety Disorder suffer from both depressive symptoms and autonomic features or involuntary symptoms such as elevated blood pressure and heart rate, sweating and digestive issues.





# How is Late Life Anxiety Manifested Differently in Older Populations?





Late life anxiety can often be “silent” and, often missed or difficult to diagnose as older adults tend to somatize psychiatric problems, have multiple psychiatric symptoms, medical and medication issues and present anxiety differently than do younger patients.



Hoarding, alcohol, and substance abuse are early and significant markers of possible underlying anxiety disorder.

# What may cause an anxiety disorder?





- Genetics
- Brain Chemistry
- Environmental Factors

# Are there side effects of treatment for anxiety disorders?

# What is the prognosis for anxiety disorders in late life?



# Can anxiety disorders be prevented?



# How common are anxiety disorders in the elderly?



# Emotional Expression





# Comorbidity and Mental Disorders

- Anxiety and depression frequently are comorbid in older populations.

# Medical Comorbidity

- Certain medical conditions have demonstrated an association with anxiety disorders and anxiety symptoms such as GI problems, hyperthyroidism, and diabetes.
- Between 80-86% of adults 65 and over have at least one chronic medical condition.

# Dementia and Cognitive Decline

- Cognitive decline is an important consideration when defining anxiety disorders in this age group because it may affect presentation of symptoms, experience of symptoms as well as the ability to communicate them.



# Mild Cognitive Impairment



- Cross-sectional research has demonstrated that older adults (age 55 and older) with clinically significant anxiety show poorer cognitive functioning.



# Treatment of Anxiety Disorders

- Medications
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Relaxation Techniques

# Additional Research is needed to:

- Assess effects of drugs to treat anxiety in younger adults vs. older adults.
- Means for adequately assessing anxiety in the elderly.
- Interactions between the hippocampus and amygdala in anxious older adults and incidence of dementia.
- How anxiety disorders in young people differ from those in older adults.
- Interactions between advancing age and comorbidity.
- How changes in life circumstances contribute to anxiety.
- DSM-V process to optimize diagnostic criteria to improve the detection and thereby treatment of anxiety disorders in late life.



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