What To Do When Driving Makes You Anxious

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Driving Anxiety

Have you ever found yourself driving down the road when a panic attack hits you out of nowhere? Or is caused by a particular incident while you are driving? Or possibly you are anxious before you ever even get in the car.

For some driving or riding in a car may provoke the fight or flight response.

Even the inappropriate triggering of the fight or flight response can lead to rapid heartbeat, sweating, hyperventilation, chest pains, lightheadedness, difficulty or heavy breathing, tingling or cold limbs, difficulty thinking, hearing loss, and tunnel vision.

These are not symptoms that you want to deal with while you are driving down the road.

What Causes Your Anxiety While Driving?

There are multiple possible anxieties and stress triggers involving vehicles and driving. Driving can be incredibly stressful for anyone, not to mention the potential dangers that are involved.

When you take a person who already has an anxiety disorder and immerse them in this stress inducing, danger riddled situation, it is not hard to see why this could become a real challenge.

Here are four possible reasons you may experience anxiety while driving or riding in a car.

1. **Fear of having a panic attack while driving.** If you have ever had a panic attack while driving, you know that this is a terrifying experience, one that will likely make your panic even worse.This could lead to being hesitant to drive, or not wanting to drive at all to avoid finding yourself in that situation again.
2. **Fear of perceived dangers.** Some may feel anxiety surrounding specific situations, such as: driving on bridges over open water; driving through tunnels; driving near semi trucks; or driving on highways. This type of anxiety could lead to taking a different route to avoid an anxiety trigger.
3. **Previous bad experiences.** If you have been in an accident or had a close call, you may feel the fear that it will happen again. This can lead to not wanting to drive or even ride in a car at all, to avoid being in another accident. This fear can even escalate to the point of becoming a phobia.
4. **Fear while being a passenger.** For some, there is a more anxiety while riding in a car as a passenger than there is while driving. This likely stems from the fear of not being in control, or possibly from having been in an accident while someone else was driving. Anxiety while riding with another driver can lead to only going places if you can drive there yourself.

These are just some of the possible causes of driving-related anxiety.

Each type of driving related anxiety listed above can become a serious hindrance in the quality of your life.

It is important that you accept that this type of anxiety is not your fault. You are not to blame! Anxiety is not something that we, or any other person, can control.

What Can You Do to Reduce Anxiety While Driving?

Here are five methods that may help you to decrease the anxiety you feel while traveling in a vehicle.

Do Not Give Up

First and foremost, do not give into your fears. Giving into your fear of driving will make the fear continue to grow.

If you have already been avoiding driving, or riding in a car, start slow. Perhaps try sitting in a parked car for short periods of time, increasing the time until you feel more comfortable.

Next, try driving in safer areas or areas where you feel more comfortable at first.

Allow yourself time to work towards becoming more comfortable behind the wheel, or in the passenger's seat. Don’t give up, remember that even small steps are still progress.

Reduce Stress

As much as you can, try to reduce your stress levels while driving.

Make sure that you have eaten something healthy and filling; have water or herbal tea to sip on; have your favorite calming music on; if possible have others ride with you if chatting with them will help to distract you from your fears.

Drive Safely

Take to care to drive within the speed limit; follow road signs; use your turn signal, and check your blind spots. Do not contribute to your fears by driving recklessly and increasing your likelihood of having an accident.

If you do have a panic attack while driving, find a safe spot to pull over or park your car. Take slow deep breaths until you feel better and can safely drive again.

Drive Mindfully

Be conscientious of how you feel and how you are reacting to situations. If you feel yourself getting tense, make a conscious effort to relax your body and muscles.

Allow yourself to address your anxious thoughts and then reassure yourself that you will be okay. Have a mantra to repeat to yourself that helps you feel calm.

Distract Yourself

This only applies to when you are riding as a passenger.

Have music playing that makes you feel relaxed; watch the scenery rather than the road; read a book; browse social media; or use a coloring app on your phone.

Find What Works For You

As with any anxiety, it may appear different from one person to another. This is also true of what coping methods will help. It is important that you find something that will work for you.

If your anxiety about driving has become extreme to the point you may pose a hazard to yourself or others, then you should consult a doctor or therapist for help. There are treatments available that may be of great benefit to you.

Anxiety can quickly take over our lives, but we can not give up. If a fear of driving is having an adverse impact on your life, why not start taking steps today to overcome your fears, and to become more comfortable while on the road?