Basic research involving animal models is an important tool to improve our understanding of clinical conditions related with anxiety and panic attacks. In fact, animal models have been used to study several paradigms on analogous and homologous elements of human anxiety phenomena. However, the direct transposition (translation) to clinical practice of the results obtained with animal models may be restricted by the different constructs used to describe and explain empirical evidence of anxiety phenomena among humans. We aimed to analyze whether theoretical assumptions on the potential inhibitory effects of anxiety on panic could be observed among humans in prospective studies designed to analyze the relationship between anxiety and panic. A systematic literature review including papers published in English language between 1997 and 2011 was undertaken on the MEDLINE database. The search yielded a total of 257 articles, of which 11 were included in the review. In three studies, the global dimension of the anxiety sensitivity construct worked as a facilitator of panic attacks. Six studies showed a positive correlation between the AS-Physical Concerns subfactor and the occurrence of panic attacks, whereas two studies found a greater effect of the AS-Mental Incapacitation Concerns subfactor on panic. There was no evidence that anxiety might act as an inhibitor of panic attacks in humans, and there were no conclusive findings on the possibility that any anxiety construct could contribute toward inhibiting panic attacks. In sum, there seems to be a need for refining descriptions of anxious phenomena addressed both in basic preclinical research and in prospective-longitudinal studies involving humans.

Keywords
Construct, anxiety, panic, prospective studies, animal models, basic research.