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Home Illnesses and conditions Mental health Panic disorder Panic disorder is where you have recurring and regular panic attacks, often for no apparent reason. Everyone experiences feelings of anxiety and panic at certain times during their lifetime. It’s a natural response to stressful or dangerous situations. However, for someone with panic disorder, feelings of anxiety, stress and panic occur regularly and at any time. Anxiety is a feeling of unease. It can range from mild to severe and can include feelings of worry and fear. There are several conditions that can cause severe anxiety including A panic attack occurs when your body experiences a rush of intense psychological (mental) and physical symptoms. You may experience an overwhelming sense of fear, apprehension and anxiety. As well as these feelings, you may also have physical symptoms such as: The number of panic attacks you have will depend on how severe your condition is. Some people may have one or two attacks each month, while others may have several attacks a week. Read more about the symptoms of panic disorder. Panic attacks can be very frightening and intense, but they’re not dangerous. An attack won’t cause you any physical harm, and it’s unlikely that you’ll be admitted to hospital if you’ve had a panic attack. As with many mental health conditions, the exact cause of panic disorder isn’t fully understood. However, it’s thought the condition is probably linked to a combination of physical and psychological factors. Read about the possible causes of panic disorder. It’s important to be aware that some physical conditions and disorders can have similar symptoms to those of anxiety. For example: See your GP if you have symptoms of anxiety or panic disorder (see above). You may be diagnosed with panic disorder if you experience recurrent and unexpected panic attacks followed by at least one month of continuous worry or concern about having further attacks. Read more about how panic disorder is diagnosed. The aim of treating panic disorder is to reduce the number of panic attacks you have and ease the severity of your symptoms. Psychological therapy and medication are the two main types of treatment for panic disorder. Read more about treating panic disorder and things you can do to help yourself during a panic attack. Having panic disorder may affect your ability to drive. It’s your legal obligation to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) about a medical condition that could have an impact on your driving ability. GOV.UK has further information and advice about driving with a disability or health condition. Panic disorder is treatable, but to make a full recovery it’s important that you seek medical help as soon as possible. Treatment for panic disorder is much more effective if it’s given at an early stage. Left untreated, panic disorder can become a very debilitating and isolating illness. It can also increase your risk of developing other mental health conditions, such as agoraphobia or other phobias.