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Panic Disorder

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What Is Panic Disorder?

01



Defining Panic Disorder

Definition

Panic disorder is an anxiety disorder characterized by recurrent, unexpected panic attacks. These attacks are intense episodes of fear that occur suddenly and without warning, often lasting several minutes.

Diagnostic Criteria

According to DSM-5, panic disorder is diagnosed when a person experiences recurrent panic attacks and persistent worry about future attacks or their consequences, such as losing control or having a heart attack.

Differentiation from Normal Stress

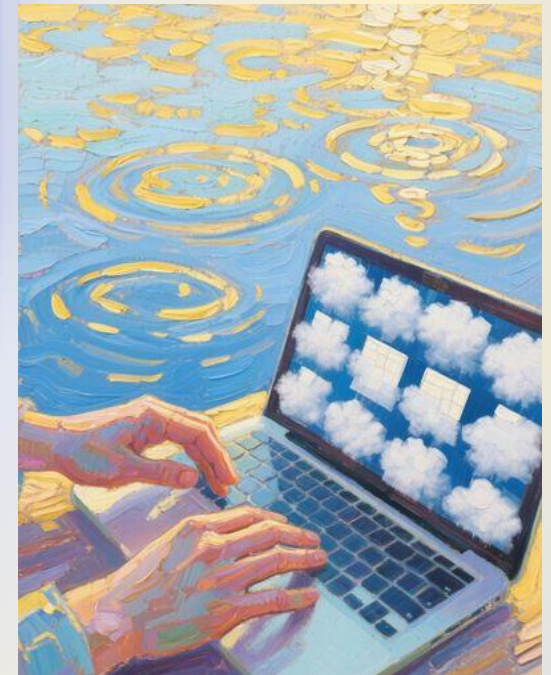
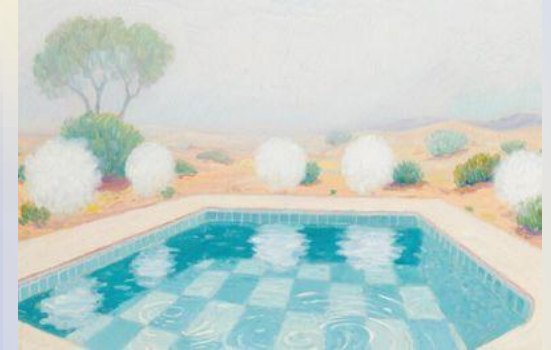
Unlike normal stress responses, panic attacks involve a sudden surge of intense fear and physical symptoms like heart palpitations, sweating, and trembling, which are disproportionate to the situation.

○ Symptoms of Panic Attacks

Panic attacks involve sudden intense fear, palpitations, sweating, trembling, shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, and a fear of losing control or dying. These symptoms peak within minutes.

○ Rapid Onset and Peak

The hallmark of panic attacks is their rapid onset and peak within minutes. This distinguishes them from other anxiety episodes, which may build up gradually over time.



● ● ● ● ● Core Symptoms Explained



Prevalence and Demographics

○ Global Prevalence

Panic disorder affects a significant portion of the global population, with lifetime prevalence rates ranging from 2% to 4% and 12-month rates around 1% to 2%.

○ Regional Variations


Regional variations exist, with some areas showing higher prevalence rates due to cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental factors.

○ Demographic Patterns

Panic disorder is more common in women than in men, with a female-to-male ratio of approximately 2:1. It typically begins in late adolescence to early adulthood.

○ Impact on Quality of Life

The disorder can significantly impair daily functioning, leading to avoidance behaviors, social isolation, and reduced quality of life.





Causes and Triggers

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Biological Risk Factors

Genetic Predisposition

There is a strong genetic component to panic disorder. Individuals with a family history of the disorder are at a higher risk, suggesting a hereditary influence.

Neurobiological Factors

Neurobiological factors such as dysregulation in the amygdala and prefrontal cortex, as well as imbalances in neurotransmitters like serotonin and norepinephrine, contribute to the development of panic disorder.



Psychological Contributors



Anxiety Sensitivity

Heightened anxiety sensitivity, where individuals are overly responsive to bodily sensations, plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of panic disorder.

Cognitive Factors

Cognitive factors such as catastrophic misinterpretation of bodily sensations contribute to the cycle of fear and avoidance. For example, a racing heart may be misinterpreted as a heart attack.

Behavioral Factors

Behavioral factors like classical conditioning to internal cues reinforce the fear response. Avoidance behaviors further perpetuate the cycle of panic.



Environmental Stressors

○ External Triggers

Environmental stressors such as major life transitions, trauma, chronic stress, and substance use can trigger panic attacks and contribute to the maintenance of panic disorder.





Diagnosis and Assessment

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Clinical Evaluation Steps



Structured Clinical Interview

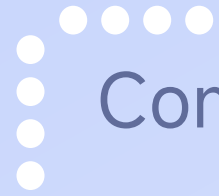
The diagnosis of panic disorder begins with a structured clinical interview to assess symptomatology, frequency, and impact on daily functioning.

Screening Tools

Validated screening tools like the Panic Disorder Severity Scale are used to quantify symptom severity and guide treatment planning.

Differential Diagnosis

Differential diagnosis is crucial to rule out medical conditions such as hyperthyroidism or cardiac issues that may mimic panic disorder.



Common Misdiagnoses

Misdiagnosis Examples

Panic disorder is often misdiagnosed as generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety, or medical conditions like arrhythmias. Accurate symptom timing and context are key to correct identification.


Importance of Accurate Diagnosis

Accurate diagnosis is essential to avoid treatment delays and ensure appropriate interventions, improving outcomes for individuals with panic disorder.





Treatment Strategies



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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



First-Line Treatment

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is the first-line treatment for panic disorder, focusing on exposure to feared sensations and cognitive restructuring of catastrophic thoughts.

Exposure Therapy

Exposure therapy involves gradually confronting feared sensations and situations to reduce anxiety and break the cycle of avoidance.

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring helps individuals challenge and replace catastrophic thoughts with more realistic and adaptive thinking patterns.

Efficacy and Benefits

CBT is highly effective, with long-term benefits in reducing symptom severity and preventing relapse. It empowers individuals with coping skills for sustained recovery.

Medication Options

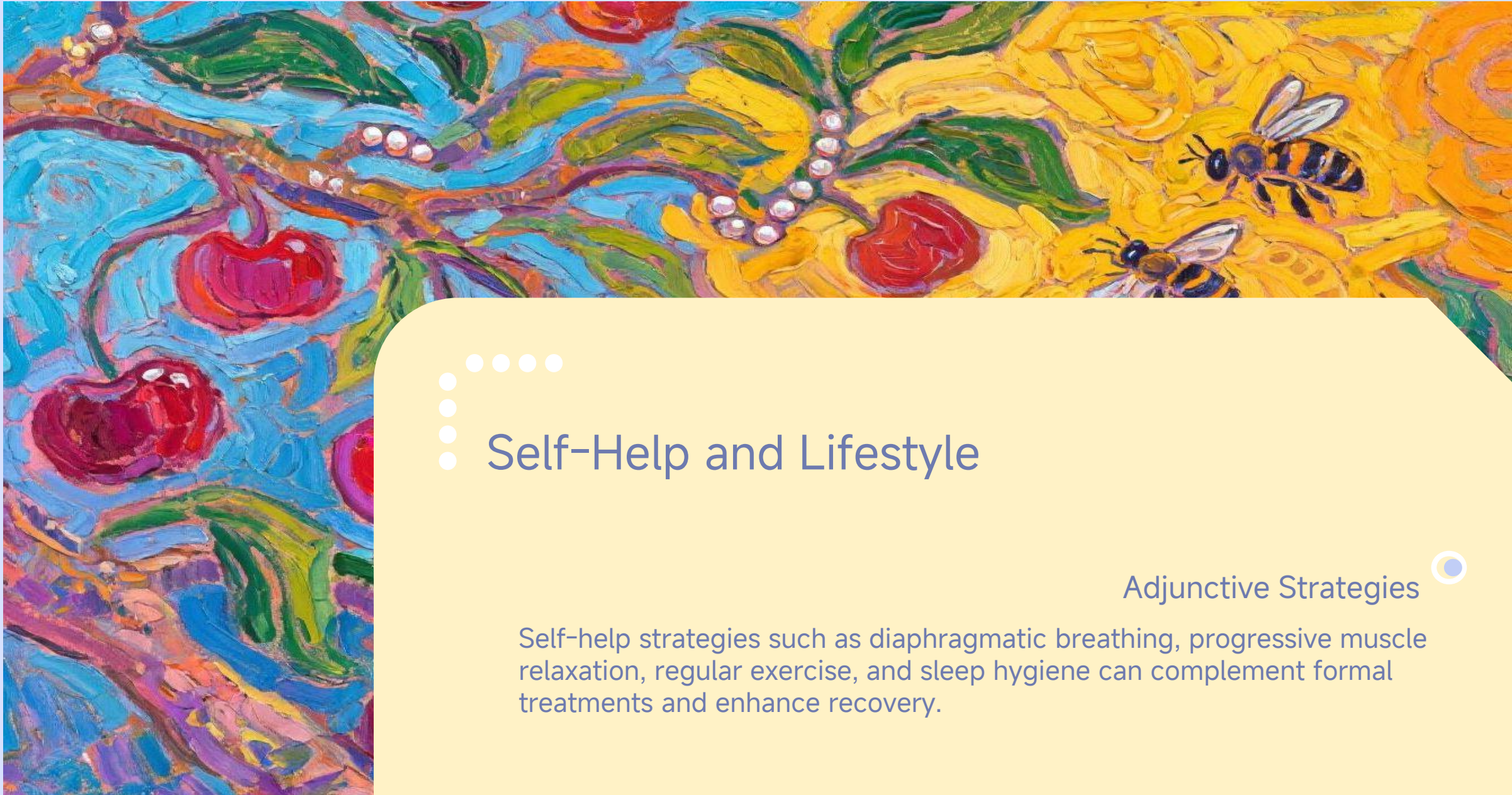


FDA-Approved Medications

FDA-approved medications for panic disorder include SSRIs, SNRIs, and short-term benzodiazepines. These medications help manage symptoms and improve quality of life.

Combination with Psychotherapy

Combining pharmacotherapy with psychotherapy, such as CBT, often yields the best outcomes. Medication can provide symptom relief while therapy addresses underlying issues.



Self-Help and Lifestyle

Adjunctive Strategies

Self-help strategies such as diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, regular exercise, and sleep hygiene can complement formal treatments and enhance recovery.



Living with Panic Disorder

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Long-Term Management

Relapse Prevention

Relapse prevention involves ongoing monitoring, booster therapy sessions, and maintaining healthy lifestyle habits to sustain recovery.

Building Resilience

Building resilience through social support, stress management techniques, and continued self-care helps individuals manage panic disorder in the long term.

Normalization of Help-Seeking

Normalizing help-seeking behaviors and engaging in regular follow-ups with healthcare providers ensures ongoing support and timely intervention if needed.





Thank You