# Coping with a Panic Disorder

Panic attacks can present a debilitating problem. Chronic panic attacks are considered a panic disorder and can quickly negatively impact a person's quality of life.

These disorders are more than fleeting moments of anxiety. They are physically and emotionally draining experiences and can quickly begin to disrupt a person's quality of life and overall well-being. In this article, we want to take this time to shed light on effective coping strategies for those struggling with panic disorders.

## What is Anxiety (& How Does it Relate to Panic?)

Panic disorder is a form of anxiety disorders. Anxiety is our body's response to stress or perceived threats. It is defined by feelings of worry, tension, or fear, especially regarding the future. When anxiety begins interfering with one's quality of life, it is considered a disorder.

Anxiety disorders can take on many different shapes and forms. These can include:

1. **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**: involves persistent and excessive worrying about a range of concerns, including work, health, relationships, or finances. The symptoms of GAD can include worry, restlessness, fatigue, foggy mind, irritability, and sleep struggles.
2. **Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)**: involves an intense fear of social situations. The person experiencing a social anxiety disorder may experience these feelings when they worry they may be scrutinized or judged. This disorder may cause a fear of public speaking, meeting someone new, or participating in group activities.
3. **Specific Phobias:** are intense and often irrational fears that pertain to specific objects or situations. Common phobias include fears of heights, spiders, snakes, or enclosed spaces. Symptoms of phobias vary depending on the specific phobia but tend to include avoidance and extreme reactions of distress when confronted with the object of their fear.
4. **Panic Disorder**: acting as the form of anxiety we are covering in this blog, panic disorder is defined by the recurrent and unexpected (or triggered) panic attacks that one experiences. These panic attacks are characterized by sudden feelings of intense fear or discomfort and can peak within a few minutes. Symptoms one may experience during a panic attack can include a rapid heartbeat, hyperventilation, trembling, sweating, hyperventilating or a shortness of breath, pain in the chest, nausea, dizziness, and an intense fear of losing control or dying.

### **What Are Panic Attacks?**

Panic attacks are defined as intense episodes of fear or discomfort. They can strike suddenly and without warning or act as the result of a certain triggering object or situation.

Panic attacks can be overwhelming and are often accompanied by intense versions of anxiety symptoms. The physical symptoms of a panic attack can include a racing heart, sweating, trembling, hyperventilation, and chest pain. The emotional symptoms can include feelings of impending doom, immense anxiety, and fear.

When one is experiencing panic attacks, the fear of another attack can become a significant concern, which can quickly lead to heightened feelings of anxiety and intensified avoidance behaviors. This can all lead to a negatively impacted quality of life.

### **Tips and Tricks for Coping with a Panic Disorder**

Experiencing a panic disorder can be overwhelming. Managing the panic attacks that accompany the disorder will involve a healthy combination of self-care strategies, social and professional support, coping skills, and therapeutic interventions:

1. **Deep Breathing and Relaxation Techniques**: When experiencing panic, your body will react in both an emotional and physical way. Working to calm yourself physically can help you find your way back to a more peaceful mindset. You can achieve this by practicing relaxation techniques like deep breathing exercises in order to help regulate your breathing patterns during a panic attack, promoting a sense of calmness and reducing the intensity of symptoms.
2. [**Mindfulness**](https://sharp.uconn.edu/using-mindfulness-to-overcome-panic-attacks/) **and Meditation**: Panic and anxiety are often a result of worrying about the future. This is why bringing yourself to the present could be beneficial. Mindfulness techniques teach individuals to stay present in the moment, which isa useful tool for reducing the likelihood of becoming overwhelmed by anxious thoughts and sensations.
3. **Physical Activity**: Regular exercise can be amazing for helping a person alleviate the symptoms of anxiety and depression, which can both appear when experiencing a panic disorder. This works because physical activity releases endorphins that boost one's mood and improve one's overall sense of well-being.
4. **Healthy Lifestyle Choices**: One thing to know about mental health that will always be relevant is the fact that your physical health heavily impacts your mental health (and vice versa). Prioritizing self-care with practices like getting adequate sleep, eating nutrient dense foods, getting outside, and reducing mood impacting stimulants like caffeine, drugs, and alcohol can play a huge role in contributing to better mental health and building your mind's resilience against panic attacks.
5. **Support Networks**: The social support you experience is crucial for your mental wellness and maintaining low stress levels. Working to build a healthy, high quality support system full of friends, family, or support groups can provide emotional reassurance, help, and validation during difficult or stressful moments of your life.

### **The Role of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in Panic Disorder Treatment**

CBT is a greatly valued and recognized therapeutic approach. It has been proven to be effective in treating and managing a wide variety of mental health struggles, like panic disorder and anxiety.

It focuses on identifying negative thought patterns and behaviors that are contributing to a person's mental health troubles, including panic attacks. The goal of this therapy is to then restructure the person's thinking patterns to benefit them.

Key components of CBT include:

* **Awareness:** The first step in CBT involves developing awareness around the thoughts that are triggering your mental health struggles and feelings of panic. This will allow a person to then take the required action steps to combat their triggers, anxieties, and fears.
* **Cognitive Restructuring**: This therapeutic technique involves challenging one's irrational thoughts and working to replace them with more realistic and balanced perspectives.
* **Exposure Therapy**: Gradually exposing oneself to situations or sensations that feel triggering of their panic attacks in a controlled and trusted environment can help individuals confront and manage their anxieties effectively.
* [**Coping Skills and Relaxation Techniques**](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK513238/): One goal of CBT involves developing coping skills and relaxation exercises that help reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety, actively preventing panic attacks from escalating.

CBT is an incredibly impactful therapeutic approach that empowers individuals, helping them develop practical and efficient strategies for managing their mental health struggles like panic disorders. This form of therapy effectively equips individuals with some of the best tools to navigate challenging situations with confidence and resilience.

### **We Are Here for You**

Understanding the nature of panic attacks, addressing underlying fears and anxiety through impactful coping skills, and building a strong support network can all be useful tools for coping with a panic disorder. However, when these approaches are not enough, it is imperative to know that there are other options.

If you are struggling with a panic disorder, know that you are not alone. Our compassionate and knowledgeable therapists are here for you. [Contact](https://www.michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php) us today, and we will work to help you begin your journey to a happier, calmer life with effective therapeutic approaches like CBT.

**References**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK513238/>  
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