

Panic attacks

A panic attack is a feeling of sudden and intense anxiety.

Panic attacks usually have physical symptoms.

These can include:

- shaking
- feeling disorientated
- feeling sick (nausea)
- rapid and irregular heartbeats
- dry mouth
- shortness of breath
- sweating and dizziness

The symptoms of a panic attack are not dangerous, but they can be very frightening. They can make you think that something catastrophic is just about to happen.

They can feel as though you're having a heart attack, or that you're going to collapse or even die.

Most panic attacks last between 5 to 30 minutes.

How to handle a panic attack

It's important not to let your fear of panic attacks control you.

Panic attacks always pass. The symptoms are not a sign of anything harmful happening. Tell yourself that anxiety is causing them.

Try to wait for the attack to pass. Try to keep doing things. If possible, do not leave the situation until the anxiety has subsided.

Confront your fear. The thing that you are fearful of happening is very unlikely to happen. Or be as bad as your anxiety predicts it will be.

As the anxiety begins to pass, try to focus on what's around you and continue to do what you were doing before. Remind yourself that the thing you were worried would happen did not happen. Or was not as bad as you thought it would be.

If you're having a short, sudden panic attack, it can be helpful to have someone with you. They can

reassure you that the symptoms will pass.

Breathing exercise for panic attacks

Doing a breathing exercise can help.

Follow these steps:

1. Breathe in as slowly, deeply and gently as you can, through your nose.
2. Breathe out slowly, deeply and gently through your mouth.
3. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5 on each breath in and out.
4. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing.

You should start to feel better in a few minutes. You may feel tired afterwards.

Preventing panic attacks

Work out what stress you might be under that could make your symptoms worse. It's important not to restrict your movements and daily activities.

Things you can do:

- Doing breathing exercises every day will help to prevent panic attacks. It will also help to relieve them when they are happening.
- Regular exercise helps to manage stress levels, release tension, improve your mood and boost confidence.
- Eat regular meals to balance your blood sugar levels.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and smoking – these can make panic attacks worse.
- Panic support groups have useful advice about how you can manage your attacks. Knowing that other people have the same feelings can be reassuring.
- Psychological therapies like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can identify and change negative thought patterns. These thought patterns can feed your panic attacks.

[Talking therapies](#)

[Healthy eating and active living](#)

Panic disorder

If you feel constantly stressed and anxious, particularly about when your next panic attack may be, you may have [panic disorder](#).

People with panic disorder may avoid situations that might cause a panic attack. They may also fear and avoid public spaces. This is known as [agoraphobia](#).

Talk to your GP if your attacks are happening regularly.

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