

# Patient education: Panic disorder (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

Please read the [Disclaimer](#) at the end of this page.

---

## What is panic disorder?

Panic disorder is a condition that can make a person feel very scared and anxious for short periods of time. When this happens, it is called a "panic attack." The attacks can also cause chest pain and breathing problems that cause people to visit doctors or emergency departments.

---

## What are the symptoms of panic disorder?

People with panic disorder have panic attacks that can make them:

- Feel very scared and nervous
- Have physical symptoms such as:
  - Chest pain
  - Trouble breathing
  - A fast heartbeat
  - Headache
  - Stomachache
  - Dizziness

The attacks happen without warning and can last several minutes to an hour.

People with panic disorder might also:

- Worry about having panic attacks in the future
- Avoid situations that might cause them to have a panic attack
- See doctors or go to emergency departments when they have panic attacks

---

## Is there a test for panic disorder?

No. There is no test. But your doctor or nurse should be able to tell if you have it by learning about your symptoms.

---

## How is panic disorder treated?

Treatments include:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) – In this type of therapy, you talk with a psychologist or counselor about the things you think and do. Then they help you change how you think about your situation and how you react to it. This teaches you how to cope better with your panic disorder. In some cases, it might be possible to do "remote" CBT. This could mean working with a therapist online or through a video call rather than in person.
- Medicines – Some medicines used to treat depression or anxiety can help people with panic disorder. Your doctor or nurse will decide which medicines are best for your situation.

Some people have CBT and also take medicines.

---

## What if I want to get pregnant?

If you take medicines to treat panic disorder, talk to your doctor before you start trying to get pregnant. Some of the medicines used to treat panic disorder can cause problems for an unborn baby, so you might need to switch medicines before you get pregnant.

---

## More on this topic

[Patient education: Generalized anxiety disorder \(The Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

**This topic retrieved from UpToDate on:** Oct 06, 2023.

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at <https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms> ©2023 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

Topic 84003 Version 10.0

→