

First aid for panic attacks

Rapid, shallow breathing can make you breathe out too much carbon dioxide, which may cause, or worsen, your symptoms. If so:

- Breathe in and out with a brown paper bag over your nose and mouth (or use your cupped hands) until you feel better.
- Don't breathe in too deeply.

How to find out more

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies
tel. 0870 443 5252, web: www.bacp.co.uk

First Steps to Freedom

advice line: 01926 851 608, web: www.first-steps.org

Mind

MindinfoLine: 0845 766 0163, web: www.mind.org.uk

National Phobics Society

tel. 0870 770 0456, web: www.phobics-society.org.uk

No Panic

helpline: 0808 808 0545, web: www.nopanic.co.uk

Further reading available from Mind Mail Order

To order books or a complete catalogue of publications send an SAE to Mind Mail Order at the address below.

How to cope with panic attacks (Mind 2004) £1

How to increase your self-esteem (Mind 2003) £1

Overcoming panic: a self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques D. Silove, V. Manicavasagar (Robinson 1997) £7.99

The Mind guide to managing stress (Mind 2003) £1

The Mind guide to relaxation (Mind 2004) £1

When panic attacks A. Tubridy (Newleaf 2003) £12.95



For better
mental health

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Mind troubleshooters: panic attacks



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A fold out factfile

Panic attacks are very frightening, and can seem to happen for no reason, but they are actually fear of fear. The panic is a reaction to physical sensations in the body, connected to being afraid, to which the person has become sensitised. These natural responses are triggered by adrenalin, and set up a feedback loop.

- One in three people can expect to have a panic attack at some stage. It's common for healthy, young adults to have occasional panic attacks.
- Attacks may be frightening, but they are not harmful or dangerous.
- An attack may be as short as a few seconds or as long as an hour. Anything longer is likely to be a series of short attacks.
- You may be more prone to panic attacks if you have depression or anxiety, asthma or diabetes, are taking stimulants (such as amphetamine or caffeine) or withdrawing from tranquillisers.

What happens during a panic attack?

How your body may react

breathlessness or breathing fast
pains in the chest
ringing in the ears
tingling or numbness
feeling sick
perspiring

very rapid heartbeat
irregular heartbeat
feeling faint or dizzy
hot or cold flushes
needing to use the toilet
choking feeling

How you may feel

absolutely terrified
that you are going to die
that you are going mad

that the world is going to end
'unreal' or cut off from the world
a sense of impending doom

Ten tips to prevent panic

- **Reduce your exposure to unnecessary stress.** Find ways to express your needs and assert yourself more successfully.
- **Change your lifestyle.** Take regular exercise. Avoid stimulants, such as cigarettes and alcohol. Eat regular meals and avoid processed foods and drinks, to keep blood sugar levels stable.
- **Don't bottle up your emotions.** Find someone to confide in, such as a family member, friend or counsellor.
- **Develop coping strategies.** Look into cognitive behaviour therapy, or other talking treatments; consult self-help books; ask about anxiety management courses.
- **Join a support group.** This allows you to share feelings and discuss strategies.
- **Learn to breathe from your diaphragm.** With hands on stomach, slowly breathe in through your nose while counting to four. Your stomach should rise (not your chest). Breathe out, to a count of four, and your stomach should collapse. Repeat four times.
- **Learn a relaxation technique.** First close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply. Locate any areas of tension and imagine the tension disappearing. Then, relax each part of the body, bit by bit, from the feet upwards. Think of warmth and heaviness. After 20 minutes, take some deep breaths and stretch.
- **Focus on the positive aspects of your life.** If you feel an attack coming on, try to distract yourself with a pleasurable task.
- **Don't depend on others for reassurance.** Tell yourself you're not dying or going mad. It's better to rely on yourself and your own coping strategies.
- **Accept and face your feelings during an attack.** They will become less intense.



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