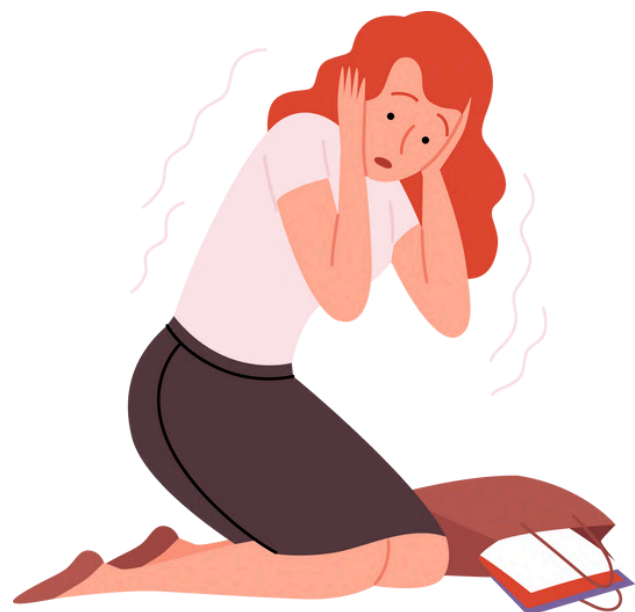


# Understanding Panic Disorder

This material aims to provide you with a better understanding of what panic disorder is and ways to manage the condition.

Panic disorder is a mental health condition characterised by recurring and unexpected panic attacks. Panic attacks are intense episodes of fear and anxiety that often reach their peak within minutes. These attacks can happen without any apparent reason and may lead to a persistent fear of having more panic attacks.



## Common Symptoms

During each episode of panic disorder, symptoms may include:



### Panic Attacks

Recurring panic attacks are the sign of panic disorder. They are sudden and overwhelming episodes of intense fear and anxiety.



### Physical Symptoms

Common symptoms during a panic attack include a racing heart, shortness of breath, trembling, dizziness, nausea, chest pain and/or sweating.



### Cognitive Symptoms

Individuals may have fear of experiencing future panic attacks. During panic attacks, individuals may experience intense and irrational thoughts (e.g., fear that one is going to die or going crazy).



### Behavioural Symptoms

To avoid future panic attacks, individuals may start avoiding situations or places where they have previously experienced panic attacks. This avoidance behaviour can lead to agoraphobia, a fear of being in situations where escape might be difficult.

It is crucial to consult a mental health professional for an accurate diagnosis.

## Causes and Risk Factors

A combination of factors can contribute to or heighten the risk of developing panic disorder. These include:

### Genetic Factors

A family history of panic disorder may increase the likelihood of developing the condition.



### Neurochemical Imbalances

Changes in brain chemicals like serotonin.



### Environmental Factors

Ongoing high-stress environments and/or the lack of social support, experience of traumatic events (e.g., accidents, assaults, etc.).



### Psychological Factors

Tendency to feel anxious, to avoid unpleasant feelings and bodily sensations and/or have unhelpful thought patterns.



### Substance Use

Substance abuse, particularly involving drugs or alcohol.



It is important to note that panic disorder is a complex condition and may not have a single identifiable cause in every case. Consulting a mental health professional can help in understanding the specific factors that may be influencing an individual's experience of panic disorder.

## Treatment Approaches for Panic Disorder

Panic disorder can be effectively managed through various treatment approaches including:

### Psychotherapy

- Psychotherapy is a collaborative process where a psychologist works with individuals in finding ways to improve their well-being.
- It involves talking with a trained psychologist in a safe and confidential setting.



### Medications

- Medications can be effective in reducing anxiety symptoms. They are usually prescribed by a psychiatrist.
- It is important to note that medication also has possible side effects, hence it is important to discuss any concerns you have regarding medication with your healthcare provider.



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Panic Disorder

### **Is it possible to mistake a panic attack for a serious medical condition, like a heart attack?**

Yes, it is possible. Panic attacks can share some symptoms with a heart attack, such as chest pain, rapid heart rate, and shortness of breath. However, there are key differences. A panic attack is a sudden surge of intense fear and anxiety, often reaching its peak within minutes. It is not life-threatening.

On the other hand, a heart attack is a serious medical emergency caused by a blocked blood vessel supplying the heart. If you're unsure, it's crucial to seek immediate medical attention. It's always better to err on the side of caution, until medical causes are ruled out and a diagnosis of panic disorder is established.

You are not alone. Seeking help is a brave step. Stay patient and celebrate small victories on your journey to managing panic disorder. With support and consistent practice of the strategies, you can overcome this challenge!

Contributed by Psychology (Allied Health Services)

This brochure is produced for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek the advice of a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health or medical condition.

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