

PANIC ATTACKS

Anxiety and panic are experienced as an emotional state with definite physical symptoms. They can occur after weeks, months or even years of being stressed or can happen with no apparent cause. Panic attacks can be triggered by such events as divorce, death of a loved one, being fired, in certain social situations or with particular people. The symptoms of anxiety can be physical – nausea, palpitations, being short of breath- or emotional- feeling you are not good enough. They can last between 5 and 35 minutes and leave you feeling shaky for up to 6 hours afterwards. It is important to know that you are not going crazy and that even though you may feel dreadful, nothing serious will actually happen.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF ANXIETY

EMOTIONAL

A continuing high level of stress is the major factor which leads to panic and anxiety. When stress is long term or overwhelming, the body reacts automatically by releasing adrenalin and cortisol. This causes the body to become sensitised to stress and everyday events will be seen as threatening or serious. Major changes in your life, sudden crisis, a situation which causes distress and seems unresolvable or too many things happening at once can all trigger anxiety. Past grief and trauma can also resurface.

PHYSICAL

There are several conditions which produce symptoms similar to panic attacks. Waking in the middle of the night with panic (unless from nightmares), indicates that the cause may be physical. The following should be checked to see if they are a possible cause of anxiety.

Thyroid	Menopause	Low blood sugar
Mitral valve	Inner ear problems (panic associated with balance)	Post viral
Food intolerance (especially wheat)		

When you become chronically stressed, you tend to lose awareness of how stressed you are. It is important to know your particular cues or warning signs, so that you can take action early to prevent things becoming overwhelming.

WARNING SIGNS

Withdrawal	Apathy, loss of incentive
Impatience	Over/under eating
Restlessness	Drug use
Chain smoking	Irritability
Communication difficulties	Headache
Backache	Sleeping too much
Constipation	Diarrhoea
Insomnia	

Once stress levels are high enough, a panic attack can occur.

MAIN SYMPTOMS OF PANIC ATTACKS

Shortness of breath	Nausea
Fast heart beat	Flushing of face
Feeling you will die	Dry mouth
Sweating	Trembling
Sensitivity to light/noise	Urge to urinate
Urge to run away	Feeling paralysed
Difficulty swallowing	Dizziness

SOME STRATEGIES FOR COPING

Stress levels: DO SOMETHING about the situation; worry won't change anything.

Nutrition: Breakfast **MUST** always be eaten then eat every three hours. Avoid sugar, caffeine, MSG, aspartame.

Relaxation: Most effective are those 'in the body' types such as Yoga, Tai Chi and progressive muscle relaxation.

Breathing: Breathing exercises can help prevent a panic attack.

Exercise: Walking is easiest. This aids sleep, lifts depression and improves breathing.

Counselling: For unresolved grief, childhood trauma, severely stressful event or if your anxiety persists or gets worse.

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