

# **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.

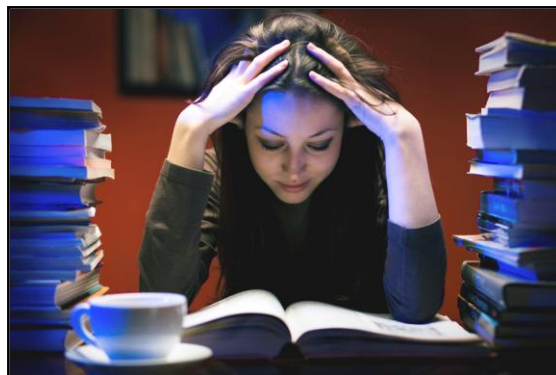
### **PHYSICAL**

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:

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

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.



For more information on this subject or any other **women's health** or **mental health issue** please contact us on (08) 9227 8122, or toll free on 1800 998 399

For information on issues specific to **Indigenous health** or for **drug and alcohol** related issues please contact us on (08) 9227 9032, or toll free on 1800 246 655