
The Anxiety Checklist

How To Know If You're Having A Panic Attack

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An Introduction to Panic Attacks

Panic attacks can be frightening for anyone and they certainly should never be ignored or dealt with in silence.

Panic attacks can signal deeper problems that can and must be treated by medical professionals. If you've been the victim of panic attacks in the past, the time to seek help is now. If you've never suffered a panic attack and aren't sure what they are, we will spend some time here outlining the basic warning signs.

Though there are a variety of reasons one might experience a panic attack ---sometimes referred to as an **anxiety attack**. The victim will typically suffer symptoms that make the attack seem much worse physically than what is really happening.

Anxious feelings may be so uncomfortable that they result in the sufferer avoiding everyday activities and can escalate into anxiety and panic disorders such as **panic attacks**.

Panic attacks are episodes of intense fear or anxiety that come without warning and without any obvious outward cause. They are far more intense than just having a feeling of being stressed out, which most people experience. Panic attacks happen suddenly and can be particularly debilitating because they can even occur during sleep.

Beyond anxiety and panic attacks themselves, a key symptom is also the persistent fear of having future panic attacks. Panic attacks are usually brief, lasting less than ten minutes. Although the exact causes of these disorders are not fully known, studies have shown that a combination of biological and environmental factors may be involved.

In many people, the symptoms develop in association with major life changes (like getting married, having a child, starting a new job, etc.) and other major lifestyle stresses.

People who have repeated attacks or feel severe anxiety about having another attack are said to have **panic disorder**.

On the positive side, these attacks are simply a mode of thinking that you **can** grow out of by applying some specific coping techniques.

First of all, be comforted by the fact that you are not the only one to experience a panic attack. Your boss was an employee once upon a time, and he or she had to turn in a report or talk about one. He or she might have fumbled and fidgeted, vomited or shook, and, in short, had a level of a panic attack. Except in cases of severe physical or mental illness, as mentioned previously, such attacks are actually a normal reaction.

Many people experience occasional panic attacks, and if you have had one or two such attacks, there probably isn't any reason to worry.

The key symptom of panic disorder is the **persistent fear** of having future panic attacks. If you suffer from repeated (four or more) panic attacks, and especially if you have had a panic attack and are in continued fear of having another, these are signs that you should consider finding a mental health professional who specializes in panic or anxiety disorders.

During anxiety or panic attacks, sufferers can also experience two very disturbing symptoms called depersonalization and derealization. These cause the sufferer to feel like they are going mad or losing their mind. These symptoms also make you feel like you are living in a dream or distant from yourself and/or the world.

The conventional treatments for anxiety disorders, including panic attacks and phobias, include cognitive behavior therapy and medication. Both methods have their place in some, but not all, cases. Many people experience side effects, interactions with other drugs, withdrawal symptoms, and rebound anxiety, when trying to stop their medication which can cause more problems.

In the case of "speaking" therapies, such as self-talk, there is noted success but still, millions of people worldwide seem to be stuck in the anxiety and panic attack cycle.

Panic disorder is a separate but related diagnosis to panic attacks. People experiencing repeated panic attacks and who meet other diagnostic criteria may be diagnosed with this illness. Panic disorder is thought to be inherited for the most part.

It's estimated that almost five percent of the American public suffer from some level of **anxiety disorder**. Some individuals are plagued even more than others with a recurrence of attacks, so many attacks that they never leave their homes. There is no single cause, rather, each individual has his or her own list of underlying causation. You may, in fact, be among the 95% who suffer what are considered "normal" panic attacks felt during every day living of life.

Diagnosis of anxiety disorders is very accurate when done by a professional. For example, you may have anxiety disorder but never suffer from panic attack symptoms.

Almost everyone experiencing symptoms of a panic attack needs evaluation. Unless the person has a history of having panic attacks, is otherwise healthy, and is experiencing a typical attack, they must be evaluated promptly by a professional practitioner. The level of evaluation depends on many factors. If you have a severe attack, err on the side of safety, go to a hospital's emergency department.

However, the presence of panic attacks is not always indicative of a panic disorder. Panic attacks can occur in the context of any anxiety disorder or other mental disorders (such as mood disorders or substance-abuse disorders, social phobia, generalized anxiety disorder, and major depressive disorder) or in healthy individuals (up to 10 percent of healthy people experience an isolated panic attack each year).

Many people with panic disorder show 'situational avoidance' associated with their panic attacks. For example, you might have an attack while driving, and start to avoid driving until you develop an actual phobia towards it. In worse case scenarios, people with panic disorder develop agoraphobia -- fear of going outdoors -- because they believe that by staying inside, they can avoid all situations that might provoke an attack, or where they might not be able to escape to safety. The fear of an attack is so debilitating, they prefer to spend their lives locked inside their homes.

The downside of these panic attack symptoms is that your body will feel tired and shaky after they subside. You may feel as if you have run a marathon yourself. Feeling tired or achy is a necessary side effect. Be aware that it may happen and, when it does, you will be prepared to deal with it.

During an attack, muscle tension can cause pain or sensations of tightness anywhere in the body; most common in anxiety are pains in the chest, neck and shoulders. Tension in these places can be distressing; the tension in your chest may cause shortness of breath or rib pain, and it may make your chest or breasts tender or numb. Pains in the muscular tissues of the neck and back can cause the blood vessels and nerves to become restricted; this can cause minor headaches or more severe migraines but can also cause the head to feel tender or painful.

More Detailed Symptoms of Panic Attacks

In order to understand panic attacks more fully, it is necessary to be aware of the many symptoms that come with one. Not all symptoms may be displayed with any one panic attack. As stated before, they come in different forms for different people.

There have even been instances where a single individual has suffered panic attacks in several entirely different ways. Still, the general symptom list of a panic attack is small.

What makes it interesting (and even potentially dangerous) is that many of the symptoms could easily be experienced with other, more serious health events. This is why you should contact a doctor or a hospital in the even of a panic attack. Better to be safe than sorry.

Here is a list of the most common panic attack symptoms.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, a true panic attack will last at least ten minutes and incorporate at least four of these symptoms simultaneously.

- **Irregular or rapid heart beating**
- **Intense sweating**
- **Some degree of shaking or shivering**
- **Difficulty breathing or the illusion of being smothered**

- **A sensation of being choked**
- **A tightening in the chest, or other heart attack-like symptoms**
- **Feelings of nausea**
- **Feelings of being light headed or dizzy**
- **A general feeling of being detached from reality**
- **Impression of a temporary loss of sanity, or the fear of losing it**
- **Fear of dying**
- **Tingling sensations throughout the body/numbness**
- **Chills or hot flashes**

In the event of suffering one of these panic attacks, the victim may be unable or find it difficult to describe to others what exactly is happening to them. They may not understand it themselves, but even if they do, the symptoms themselves may make it impossible to communicate.

Even if they can communicate, they may be incoherent and rambling. This can be diagnosed quickly by a professional, however, which is more the reason one should be seen in the event of such an emergency.

It has also been noted in recent study that there are usually differences in the way a woman suffers a panic attack as opposed to a man. In women, the focus tends to be on the respiratory effects. The reasons behind this are not clear as of yet.

Why You Should Get Help

It may occur to you that a panic attack is a self contained event, unworthy of medical attention. Let me share two points:

One: Reading about a panic attack is an entirely different situation than experiencing one. When in the throes of a panic attack, it will be easy to see this difference.

Two: Medical attention is required immediately, particularly if you or a friend is experiencing their first panic attack in order to accurately diagnose the source of the distress. You need to be sure that a life threatening event is not the cause. A panic attack has very specific symptoms, but many of them are also symptoms of other, much more serious health illnesses. You must not ignore this possibility.

Once a panic attack has been diagnosed by a medical professional (and make no mistake, a professional is the only one qualified to make such a diagnosis) the victim should undergo a system of evaluation. This will include a thorough look at the patient and a battery of physical tests. It will also include a thorough look at their medical history. This is done to make sure there is not a history of these episodes as well as making sure the root cause can be identified.

While causation is not well known in the medical field, it has been shown that stress and other mental issues can be powerful reasons for panic attacks. Medication and lifestyle change can create an atmosphere where the likelihood of future attacks is decreased.

Recommended Resources

The PanicAway Method



[Click here!](#)

Easy Calm Video Program



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The Linden Method

The Linden Center

For Anxiety, Panic OCD & Phobias

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