

E BOOK ON
Panic Attack

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Panic disorder often begins during late teens or early adulthood. Women are more prone to developing panic disorder than men. However, physical symptoms in panic attacks are less intense. Panic attacks usually last 5-20 minutes, but people with severe panic disorder can have panic attacks lasting up to one hour.

Symptoms

A panic attack is a sudden episode of intense fear or anxiety that can be overwhelming and debilitating. It can occur unexpectedly and without any apparent reason. Here are some common symptoms of a panic attack:

- 1. Rapid heartbeat or palpitations:** During a panic attack, your heart may start racing or pounding. This can be accompanied by a feeling of tightness in the chest.
- 2. Shortness of breath:** Many people experience difficulty breathing during a panic attack. It may feel like you can't get enough air or that you're suffocating.
- 3. Sweating:** Profuse sweating is a common symptom of a panic attack. You may notice that your palms are sweaty or that you're breaking out in a cold sweat.
- 4. Trembling or shaking:** Your body may start trembling or shaking uncontrollably during a panic attack. This can be particularly noticeable in your hands or legs.
- 5. Feeling dizzy or lightheaded:** Some individuals experience dizziness or a sensation of being lightheaded during a panic attack. This can make you feel unsteady or like you're about to faint.
- 6. Chest pain or discomfort:** Chest pain is a common symptom of a panic attack and can be mistaken for a heart attack. It may feel like a sharp or squeezing pain in the chest.



A panic attack is a sudden, intense feeling of fear and terror that triggers severe physical reactions, such as heart palpitations (racing heart), fast breathing, and sweating. Panic attacks cause sudden, temporary feelings of fear that can lead to physical reactions, even in normal, non-threatening situations. A person experiencing a panic attack may sweat excessively, have difficulty breathing, and feel their heart racing. Sometimes, it can even feel like a person is having a heart attack.

Panic attacks mainly occur due to panic disorder, but they can also be caused by other conditions, such as:

- Phobias
- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders
- Trauma and stress-related disorders
- Substance use disorders
- Certain medical conditions

What is panic disorder?

Panic disorder is an anxiety disorder that involves multiple unexpected panic attacks. The main aspect of panic disorder is that the attacks happen without warning and are not caused by another mental health or physical condition. There is no specific trigger for them.

The difference between an anxiety attack and a panic attack is that an anxiety attack is caused by certain stressors and may build up gradually. In contrast, panic attacks happen suddenly and unexpectedly. Anxiety often causes physical symptoms like a racing heart, but these symptoms are generally less intense and last longer than a panic attack.



7. Nausea or stomach discomfort: Many people experience gastrointestinal symptoms during a panic attack, such as nausea, stomach pain, or an upset stomach.

8. Fear of losing control or going crazy: Panic attacks can be accompanied by a sense of impending doom or a fear of losing control. You may worry that you're going crazy or that something terrible is about to happen.

9. Tingling or numbness: Some individuals experience tingling or numbness in their extremities, such as their fingers or toes, during a panic attack.

10. Chills or hot flashes: You may experience sudden chills or hot flashes during a panic attack. This can make you feel cold or sweaty.

It's important to note that these symptoms can vary from person to person, and not everyone will experience all of them during a panic attack. Additionally, these symptoms can also be indicative of other medical conditions, so it's essential to consult a healthcare professional for an accurate diagnosis.

Causes

Panic attacks can be triggered by various factors.

Understanding these causes can help individuals manage and prevent panic attacks more effectively. Here are some common causes:

1. Genetics: Research suggests that panic attacks can run in families. If you have a close relative who experiences panic attacks, you may be more prone to having them as well.

2. Stress: High levels of stress can contribute to the development of panic attacks. Stressful life events, such as the loss of a loved one, divorce, or financial difficulties, can trigger intense feelings of anxiety and panic.



3. Trauma: Individuals who have experienced a traumatic event, such as physical or sexual abuse, a car accident, or a natural disaster, may be more susceptible to panic attacks. Trauma can have a lasting impact on mental health and increase the risk of panic disorder.

4. Substance abuse: The use of drugs and alcohol can exacerbate anxiety symptoms and increase the likelihood of panic attacks. Substance abuse can disrupt brain chemistry and make individuals more vulnerable to experiencing intense anxiety.

5. Medical conditions: Certain medical conditions, such as hyperthyroidism, heart disease, and respiratory disorders, can mimic the symptoms of a panic attack. It is important to rule out any underlying medical conditions that may be contributing to the onset of panic attacks.

6. Medications: Some medications, including certain antidepressants and stimulants, can trigger panic attacks as a side effect. It is crucial to discuss any potential side effects with your healthcare provider when starting a new medication.

7. Phobias: Specific phobias, such as a fear of flying or heights, can lead to panic attacks when individuals are exposed to their feared stimuli. The intense fear and anxiety associated with phobias can trigger a panic response.

8. Personality traits: Certain personality traits, such as being highly sensitive or having a tendency to worry excessively, can increase the likelihood of experiencing panic attacks. Individuals with these traits may be more prone to interpreting physical sensations as signs of danger.



Mental health conditions

People who have anxiety disorders, mental health conditions are more prone to having panic attacks.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)

Panic attacks are particularly hard for children and young people. Children between the ages of 1 and 17 who have traumatic experiences may develop panic disorder and experience panic attacks. Severe panic disorders can affect children's development and learning.

Treatments

Medications

Medications which can help treat panic attacks are

❖ Antidepressant

Antidepressant medication helps reduce the severity of panic, eliminate panic attacks, and improve overall quality of life for individuals with panic disorders.

The choice of antidepressants should be based on side effect profiles and patient preferences. Healthcare providers may prescribe serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs).

vAnti-anxiety medications

Benzodiazepines are used to treat and prevent panic attacks.

They are most commonly prescribed by healthcare workers.

While they help with anxiety, patients can become addicted to them, so it is very important to take them with caution.

Psychotherapy

❖ A specific type of psychotherapy that can help with panic attacks is

CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)



Meta-analyses support the efficacy of CBT in improving panic symptoms and overall disability. Meta-analyses have found that specialized cognitive therapy, behavior therapy, and combined CBT are very supportive for patients with panic disorder.

CBT involves many techniques, such as:

- Ø Applied relaxation
- Ø Exposure through imagery
- Ø Exposure in vivo
- Ø Breathing retraining
- Ø Cognitive structuring

Exposure Therapy

Exposure therapy involves gradually and repeatedly exposing oneself to a scenario or condition, either in imagination or in reality, that causes or triggers panic attacks. Over time, the person becomes more comfortable with the situation and it no longer causes anxiety or panic attacks. Relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, are taught to help manage anxiety.

❖ Antidepressants Plus CBT

Results from a recent study have suggested that antidepressants, when combined with CBT, are initially slightly more effective during therapy.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy is a unique approach because it taps into the client's emotional and somatic experiences. The mind-body connection enables clients to become aware of emotions that may be trapped in their physical bodies. Hypnotherapy helps clients access their subconscious minds and experience a sense of healing.