

Understanding PANIC DISORDERS

There's no way to truly understand what it's like to experience a panic attack until you actually have one, which is why any advice on how to cope with a panic attack quickly falls into one of two categories – what to do if you believe you are having one, and what to do if someone around you is having what appears to be a panic attack, which will mimic the symptoms of a real medical emergency.



What Is Panic Disorder?

Panic disorder is a psychological condition that shows up in the form of sometimes violent physical symptoms. These symptoms, called panic attacks, can literally make the victim feel as though he or she is dying: rapid heart rate, difficulty breathing, excessive sweating, dizziness, trembling, intense anxiety, a feeling of loss of control, and helplessness. Imagine what it would be like to jump out of an airplane only to find your parachute won't open – that's pretty close to what panic attack victims are feeling in the moment.

When the attacks occur regularly or appear to be caused by a specific set of circumstances, then panic disorder is the cause. There is no specific treatment for a panic *attack*, per se. But the underlying condition, panic disorder, can be treated with a combination of medications and psychotherapy.

What Causes Panic Disorder?

Like many psychological conditions, panic disorder can originate in many different ways, some of them making little logical

sense. A person with a phobia such as fear of heights or enclosed places might experience a panic attack if he or she is in this situation. Alcohol, drugs, and trauma can trigger it. But the cause itself has no bearing on the reaction to it because the threat felt by the victim is one entirely of perception rather than reality.

What to Do if You Have a Panic Attack

The only way to stop a panic attack is to allow it to end, and the only way to do that is to diminish the underlying fear that causes the symptoms. If you allow yourself to experience the symptoms, with a clear realization that there is no real danger, then the attack may be shortened. Breathe deeply and don't give in to dangerous impulses such as running away or jumping off something. Know that the effects will pass. The more you experience even the smallest triumph of logic over fear, the less intense your attacks will become. If the attacks continue, seek help from a medical professional.

What to Do if You See Someone Having a Panic Attack

Like a child fearing the boogeyman in the closet, there is little you can do for someone having a panic attack. Tell them to keep breathing and assure them that there is no danger. The problem here is that the victim will tell you that he or she is having a heart attack, can't breathe, or feels like he or she is about to pass out, and odds are good that you aren't qualified to assess the reality of that perception. Call for help quickly and do your best to calm the victim until help arrives. The best thing you can do when it's over is offer comfort, assure the person that there was never any real danger, and encourage him or her to seek help for panic disorder.



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1-877-747-1200 to speak with
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