



## Panic Attack!

A panic attack is a sudden, intense fear or anxiety that may make you short of breath or dizzy or make your heart pound. You may feel out of control. Some people believe they are having a heart attack or are about to die. An attack usually lasts from 5 to 20 minutes but may last even longer, up to a few hours.

### What causes panic attacks?

Experts aren't sure what causes panic attacks. But the body has a natural response when you are stressed or in danger. It speeds up your heart, makes you breathe faster, and gives you a burst of energy. This is called the fight-or-flight response. It gets you ready to either cope with or run away from danger. A panic attack occurs when this response happens when there is no danger.

Panic attacks may also be brought on by:

- A health problem such as an overactive thyroid (hyperthyroidism), or heart or breathing problems.
- Depression or another mood disorder.
- Alcohol abuse.
- Using too much nicotine or too much caffeine.
- Taking certain medicines, such as those used to treat asthma and heart problems.
- Using illegal drugs such as marijuana or cocaine.
- Living with high levels of stress for a long time.

### What are the symptoms?

- A feeling of intense fear, terror, or anxiety.
- Trouble breathing or very fast breathing.
- Chest pain or tightness.
- A heartbeat that races or is not regular.
- Sweating.
- Nausea or an upset stomach.
- Dizziness and shaking.
- Numbness or tingling.

### How are panic attacks diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask about your past health and do a physical exam. The exam may include listening to your heart, checking your blood pressure, and ordering blood tests to look for other causes of your problem. Your doctor may ask you to do some simple things that test your memory and other mental skills.

### How are they treated?

Treatments for panic attacks include counseling and medicine. Using both will often work best. Treatment can help most people control or even stop attacks. But symptoms can come back, especially if you stop treatment too soon.

**If you would like more information, please contact  
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