



## **Do You Experience Panic or Anxiety Attacks?**

A panic attack (often called an anxiety attack) is a sudden surge of overwhelming fear that comes without warning and without any obvious reason. It is far more intense than the feeling of being 'stressed out' that most people experience.

Symptoms of a panic attack include:

- Racing heartbeat
- Difficulty breathing, feeling as though you 'can't get enough air'
- Terror that is almost paralyzing
- Dizziness, lightheadedness or nausea
- Trembling, sweating, shaking
- Choking, chest pains
- Hot flashes, or sudden chills
- Tingling in fingers or toes ('pins and needles')
- Fear that you're going to go crazy or are about to die

You probably recognize this as the classic 'flight or fight' response that human beings experience when we are in a situation of danger. But during a panic attack, these symptoms seem to rise from out of nowhere. They occur in seemingly harmless situations--they can even happen while you are asleep. In addition to the above symptoms, a panic attack is marked by the following conditions:

- Attack occurs suddenly, without warning and without any way to stop it.
- Level of fear is way out of proportion to the actual situation; often, in fact, it's completely unrelated.
- Attack passes in a few minutes; the body cannot sustain the 'fight or flight' response for longer than that. However, repeated attacks can continue to recur for hours.

A panic attack is not dangerous, but it can be terrifying, largely because it feels 'crazy' and 'out of control.' Panic disorder is frightening because of the panic attacks associated with it, and also because it often leads to other complications such as phobias, depression, substance abuse, medical complications, even suicide. Its effects can range from mild work or social impairment to a total inability to face the outside world. In fact, the phobias that people with panic disorder develop do not come from fears of actual objects or events, but rather from fear of having another attack. In these cases, people will avoid certain objects or situations because they fear that these things will trigger another attack.

Anxiety and panic attacks can be treated with therapy and medication.