



## Panic Attacks

Panic disorder is different from the normal fear and anxiety reactions to stressful events in our lives. Panic disorder is a serious condition that strikes without reason or warning. Symptoms of panic disorder include sudden attacks of fear and nervousness, as well as physical symptoms such as sweating and a racing heart. During a panic attack, the fear response is out of proportion for the situation, which often is not threatening. Over time, a person with panic disorder develops a constant fear of having another panic attack, which can affect daily functioning and general quality of life.

Panic disorder often occurs along with other serious conditions, such as depression, alcoholism, or drug abuse.

### What Are the Symptoms of Panic Disorder?

Symptoms of a panic attack, which often last about 10 minutes, include:

- Difficulty breathing.
- Pounding heart or chest pain.
- Intense feeling of terror.
- Sensation of choking or smothering.
- Dizziness or feeling faint.
- Trembling or shaking.
- Sweating.
- Nausea or stomachache.
- Tingling or numbness in the fingers and toes.
- Chills or hot flashes.
- A fear that you are losing control or are about to die.



Beyond the panic attacks themselves, a key symptom of panic disorder is the persistent fear of having future panic attacks. The fear of these attacks can cause the person to avoid places and situations where an attack has occurred or where they believe an attack may occur.

### What Causes Panic Disorder?

Although the exact cause of panic disorder is not fully understood, studies have shown that a combination of factors, including biological and environmental, may be involved. These factors include:

- Family history. Panic disorder has been shown to run in families. It may be passed on to some people by one or both parent(s) much like hair or eye color can.
- Abnormalities in the brain. Panic disorder may be caused by problems in parts of the brain.
- Substance abuse. Abuse of drugs and alcohol can contribute to panic disorder.
- Major life stress. Stressful events and major life transitions, such as the death of a loved one, can trigger a panic disorder.

## How Common Is Panic Disorder?

Panic disorder affects about 2.4 million adult Americans. Panic disorder most often begins during late adolescence and early adulthood. It is twice as common in women as in men.

## How Is Panic Disorder Diagnosed?

If symptoms of panic disorder are present, the doctor will begin an evaluation by performing a complete medical history and physical exam. Although there are no laboratory tests to specifically diagnose panic disorder, the doctor may use various tests to look for physical illness as the cause of the symptoms.

If no physical illness is found, you may be referred to a psychiatrist or psychologist, mental health professionals who are specially trained to diagnose and treat mental illnesses. Psychiatrists and psychologist use specially designed interview and assessment tools to evaluate a person for panic disorder.

The doctor bases his or her diagnosis on reported intensity and duration of symptoms, including the frequency of panic attacks, and the doctor's observation of the patient's attitude and behavior.



Source: [www.AnxietyPanic.com](http://www.AnxietyPanic.com)  
Courtesy of *Wellness Proposals*

## 2014 Spotlight on Dignity & Respect Tips

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Say "Hello."  
You could make someone's day.

Say "Thank you."  
Gratitude is a gift  
that's never too small to give.