

What is a panic attack?

Panic attacks are a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of your body's normal response to danger, stress or excitement.



Physical symptoms include:

- a pounding/racing heartbeat
- feeling faint, dizzy or light-headed
- feeling very hot or very cold
- sweating, trembling or shaking
- nausea
- pain in your chest or abdomen
- struggling to breathe
- feeling like your legs are shaky
- feeling disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings

Thoughts you may have:

- I'm losing control
- I'm going to faint
- I'm having a heart attack
- I'm going to die
- I'm going to embarrass myself
- I need to escape



When might I have panic attacks?

Panic attacks happen at different times for everyone. Some people have one panic attack then don't ever experience another, or you might find that you have them regularly, or several in a short space of time.



You might notice that certain places, situations or activities seem to trigger panic attacks.



Most panic attacks last between 5 to 20 minutes. Your symptoms will usually be at their worst within 10 minutes. You might also experience symptoms of a panic attack over a longer period of time. This could be because you're having a second panic attack, or you're experiencing other symptoms of anxiety.

How can I manage a panic attack?

Panic attacks can be frightening, but there are things you can do to help yourself cope.



Focus on your breathing. It can help to concentrate on breathing slowly in and out while counting to five.

Stamp on the spot. Some people find this helps control their breathing.



Focus on your senses. For example, taste mint-flavoured sweets or gum, or touch or cuddle something soft.

Try grounding techniques. These can help you feel more in control.



What can I do after a panic attack?

Think about self-care. Try to pay attention to what your body needs after you've had a panic attack. For example, you might need to rest somewhere quietly, or eat or drink something.



Tell someone you trust. If you feel able to, it could help to let someone know you've had a panic attack. It could be helpful to mention how they might notice if you're having another one, and how you'd like them to help you.



Remember: Panic attacks are really common and no physical harm can come from having one. You can actually think yourself into having a panic attack but this also means that you can think yourself out of one. With time, you can begin to control panic when you feel it building up.

