

Some causes of panic attacks:

- Stressful events
- Hyperventilation
- Heat/exercise
- Inner ear problems
- Unstable blood sugars levels
- Low blood pressure
- Anxiety disorders
- Injections containing adrenaline
- Reactions to drugs (especially benzodiazepines if used long term)
- Drug, alcohol or nicotine withdrawal

Slowing your breathing is very effective at relieving the symptoms of a panic attack. If you experience multiple panic attacks, learning to relax by practicing slow deep abdominal breathing will be helpful.

You will also benefit by seeing a psychologist or counsellor. Call Reconnexion for information, advice or referral.

Breathing techniques to help with panic attacks

Learn to recognise the first signs of over breathing. When you feel a panic attack coming on:

1. Stop what you are doing, sit down or lean against something.
2. If possible lower your head and focus on one thing.
3. Breathe in slowly for the count of 3
4. Hold your breath for the count of 3
5. Breathe out slowly for the count of 3

Concentrate only on breathing and counting

- ◀ Remind yourself: These feelings are normal & they cannot hurt you
- ◀ Remind yourself: These feelings will soon pass
- ◀ Keep breathing and counting until the panic symptoms subside

Your symptoms will usually subside within a minute or two. If you are unable to start the breathing cycle as soon as you would wish, you might find it useful to breathe first into your cupped hands (to breathe in the carbon dioxide) and then to start the slow breathing cycle.

Panic feelings will subside when you **SLOW** your breathing down

Stop what you are doing

Lower your head

Only focus on 3 second breathing

Wait until panic symptoms subside

Pick up a HOW TO MANAGE A PANIC ATTACK wallet card and carry it with you to remind you what to do.

Reconnexion - 1300 273 266



*What is a
Panic Attack
and what
helps!*

*Visit our website for more information
www.reconnexion.org.au
or phone 1300 273 266*

Head Office 1939 Malvern Rd, Malvern East. 3145
Branches at Melton and Cranbourne

You may have been told that you have had an anxiety attack or panic attack, so what does that mean?

A PANIC ATTACK is a distinct period in which there is the sudden onset of intense apprehension, fearfulness, or terror, often associated with feelings of impending doom. During these attacks, symptoms such as shortness of breath, palpitations, chest pain or discomfort, choking or smothering sensations, and fear of “going crazy” or losing control are present.

The symptoms of a panic attack can often be confused with a heart attacks. It is important that you check out the symptoms to ensure there is no physical medical reason.

What are the symptoms of a panic attack?

- racing or pounding heart
- irregular heartbeats
- dizziness or light headedness
- disorientation and difficulty thinking clearly
- feelings of unreality
- tightness or pressure in the chest
- difficulty breathing
- shortness of breath
- sweating and shaking
- hot or cold flushes
- rising agitation
- need to go to the toilet
- numbness or tingling sensations (particularly in the face, hands & feet)

What is happening in the body to produce these symptoms?

- The mind becomes alert
- Heart rate speeds up and blood pressure rises.
- Blood is diverted to the muscles which tense, ready for action.
- Breathing rate speeds up to increase oxygen to muscles. Nostrils and air passages in lungs open wider to take air in more quickly.
- Sweating increases to help cool the body.
- Digestion slows down - not necessary for survival.
- Saliva production decreases, causing a dry mouth.
- Liver releases sugar to provide quick energy.
- Immune responses decrease, which is useful in the short term to allow a massive response to immediate threat, but can become harmful over a long period.
- Blood clotting agents increase, preparing for possible injury.

Symptoms of overbreathing (hyperventilation)

Overbreathing can help the body prepare for action, but if no action takes place and it continues for too long, it can produce additional symptoms such as;

- dizziness
- confusion
- blurred vision
- dry mouth
- light headedness
- breathlessness
- feelings of unreality
- rapid heartbeat

- feeling faint
- headache
- desire to run
- irregular or missed heartbeats
- temporary paralysis of muscles
- fear of impending doom, heart attack, death
- trembling hands or feet
- rising apprehension
- stiffness in muscles

Characteristic types of panic attack are:

- unexpected panic attacks, where the attack occurs ‘out of the blue’ or spontaneously without any apparent trigger
- situationally bound panic attack – this attack occurs immediately on exposure to a particular trigger - ie seeing a snake or dog or blood etc
- situationally predisposed panic attacks - these are more likely to occur on exposure to a trigger but it may not always be the same trigger and may not occur immediately