

doing well



What is a
PANIC ATTACK?

What is a panic attack?

Everyone knows what panic is, and it is common to feel panicky from time to time:

- You discover you have had your wallet stolen.
- You are sitting an exam. You look at the paper and realise you don't know the answers to any of the questions.

It would be normal in either of these situations to feel a sense of panic. This feeling would pass fairly quickly.

A ***panic attack*** is a bit like 'normal' panic, but different in certain ways:

- The feelings seem to come 'out of the blue' and are not usually related to the sort of frightening situation described above.
- The feelings are a lot stronger.

It is because the feelings are UNEXPECTED and STRONG that they can be extremely frightening.

THE TRUTH IS: **NOTHING** AWFUL IS GOING TO HAPPEN, BECAUSE PANIC ATTACKS ARE **NOT** DANGEROUS.

Lots of people have panic attacks. They are **not** signs of serious mental or physical illness. Panic affects your body, your mind and the way you behave, but in different ways for different people.

Here is a list of some of the things that can happen to people having a panic attack. Some people have all of the symptoms, others just a few.

Your body

Difficulty in breathing

Dizziness

Racing heart

Chest pains

Tingling sensations

Shaking

Sweating

Your mind

Feelings of utter terror

Feelings of unreality, as though you're not really there

Frightening thoughts such as:

"I'm going to have a heart attack"

"I will collapse or faint"

"I'm running out of air"

"I'm going mad"

"I'm losing control"

"I'm going to make a complete fool of myself"

"I've got to get out of here"

Your behaviour

You try to leave the situation as quickly as possible

You avoid the situation in the future

All of the panic symptoms described above are simply an extreme form of fear. Fear is our body's natural response to a situation we see as dangerous.

Fear is very useful. It prepares your body for action. This has been called the '**fight or flight**' response. When you feel fear, your body is preparing to fight or run away. When you are frightened, you:

- Breathe more quickly so that you can get lots of oxygen to your muscles.
- Your heart beats faster to pump the blood faster round your body.
- Your digestive system slows down so that your body can focus on the more immediate threat.

This is your body's normal healthy reaction to situations where your body feels under threat. It is your body's alarm system.

The problem with panic attacks is that they usually occur when there is no clear physical threat at all. Your body is reacting as though it was about to be attacked when in reality it is not.

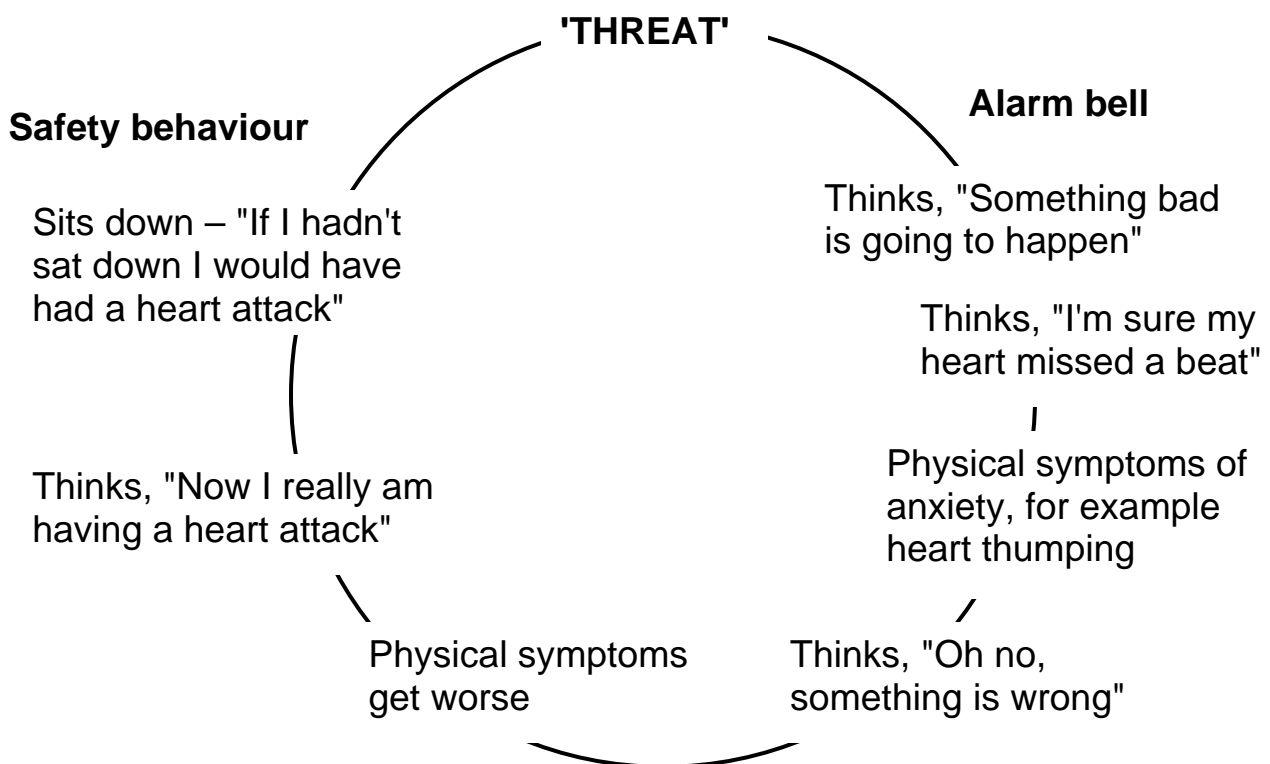
What causes panic attacks to begin?

Panic attacks can happen for a number of reasons:

- Stress
- Health worries
- During a mild illness
- Because of strong emotions
- Out of the blue

What keeps panic attacks going?

Panic affects your body, your thoughts and your behaviour. All three work together to keep panic going.



What techniques can help me cope with and reduce panic attacks?

The good news is that panic attacks are very treatable. You may find that your panic attacks have already started to reduce because you have begun to recognise and understand, and accept that they are not harmful.

Panic affects your body, your mind and your behaviour. By learning to change in each of these areas you can learn to cope with panic attacks.

For more detail, please see leaflet PANIC: A Self Help Guide.

Further help

If you feel you may need professional help, talk to your GP who might be able to provide this or who may refer you on to someone else who can.

Some useful helplines

No Panic

Free Helpline (daily 10am-10pm)

Tel: 0808 808 0545

Borderline Helpline (local)

Free Mental Health Helpline
(Mon-Fri, 7-10pm; Sat & Sun 6-10pm)

Tel: 0800 027 4466

Breathing Space

Free Depression Helpline (daily 6pm-2am)

Tel: 0800 83 85 87

Panic websites

www.joepanic.com

Information and advice on coping skills; introduction to cognitive therapy and worksheets that can be downloaded and completed; explains importance of good breathing and gives exercises to try; comprehensive links and resource pages.

www.panic-attacks.co.uk

A “panic attack course” that can be completed online or can be emailed to complete in your own time; explains what panic is, why people have panic attacks and how thoughts cause panic; explains how to change the way you think and how to control panic through breathing and relaxation.

www.nopanic.org.uk

Comprehensive help for panic and associated conditions. Includes telephone and written recovery programmes.

Useful Books

Butler, G and Hope, T (1995) *Manage Your Mind*. Oxford
ISBN: 0192623834 (Chapter 19: Dealing with Panic: Controlling the Alarm System)

Jeffers, Susan (1987) *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* Vermilion
(reprinted 2004) ISBN: 0712671056 (Easy to read. Encourages acceptance and a change in attitude.) Also available in audio format

Silove, Derrick & Manicavasagar, Vijaya (1997) *Overcoming Panic*.
Constable & Robinson. ISBN: 1854877011

Trickett, S. (1992) *Coping Successfully with Panic Attacks*. Sheldon
Press. ISBN: 0859696464

Weekes, Claire (1995) *Self Help for your Nerves*. Thorsons
ISBN: 0722531559 (Emphasises coping with physical aspects of anxiety and panic. A little old-fashioned in style, but clear.)

To cut out and keep:



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Coping with Panic

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- The feelings are **normal** bodily reactions; they are **not** harmful
- Do not add frightening thoughts, describe what is happening
- Wait for the feelings to pass
- Plan what to do next, then start off slowly

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