

## Panic Attacks – Information for Students

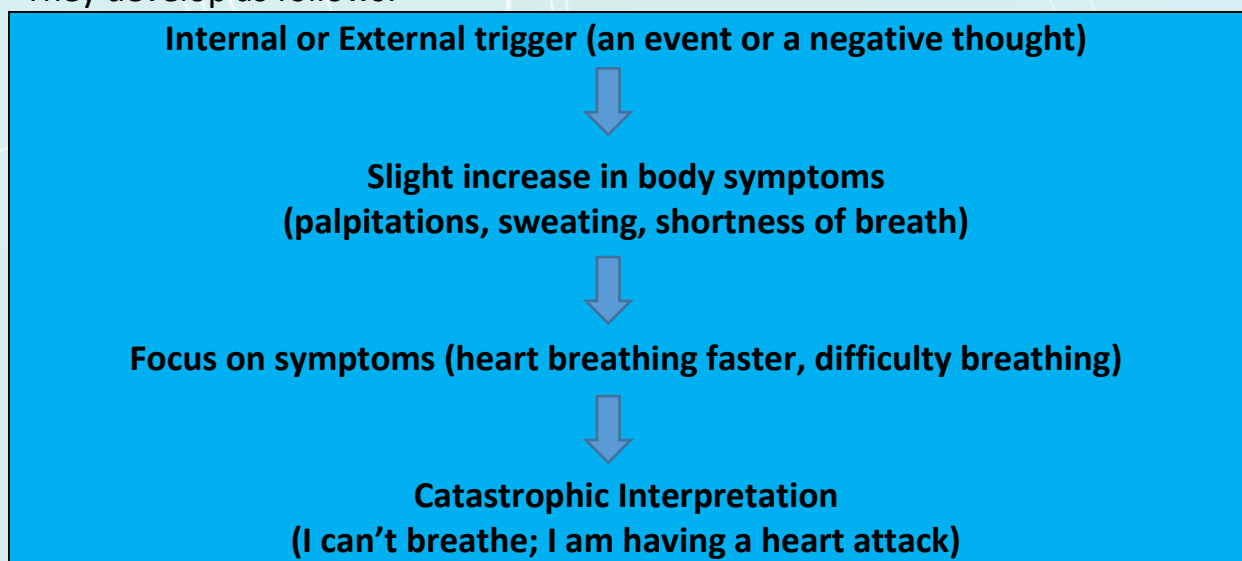
### What is a Panic Attack?

Panic attacks are sudden feelings of intense fear or anxiety. Panic attacks are common.

### What causes Panic Attacks?

They can be triggered by a major life event but at times there is no obvious reason why they start. They may be a sign that there are underlying issues that need to be addressed.

They develop as follows:



An event or **negative thought** causes an **increase in adrenalin** which is pumped around your body. We are prewired to respond to danger to protect ourselves. In prehistoric times this was to help you run away or deal with a dangerous situation. It is called *the fight or flight response*. A panic attack happens when, although there is no threat or danger your body is responding as if there is.

## What are the Symptoms of a Panic Attack?

The symptoms of a panic attack can often be frightening and are listed below:

### Physical Symptoms

- Racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Tingling sensation, pins and needles (particularly in hands)
- Blurred vision
- Sound distortion
- Nausea
- Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing
- Sweating or trembling
- Headaches
- Diarrhoea
- Skin rashes or flare ups
- Butterflies in stomach
- Chest/stomach pains
- Loss of appetite

### Behavioural Symptoms

- Avoiding places
- Avoiding people and social situations
- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Excessive drinking/smoking/eating
- Difficulty sleeping/nightmares
- Increased irritability

### Mental Symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Distorted or irrational thoughts
- Excessive worrying
- Thinking negatively

Panic attacks can last from a **few seconds to 10 minutes**.

When you are in the midst of panic you may feel that you **are going mad, going deaf, going blind, can't breathe, having a heart attack** etc. You may be afraid that **others will notice** that you are anxious or that you might **lose control** and **faint or start running or screaming** etc. This all makes the panic worse.

### REMEMBER:

**A PANIC ATTACK CANNOT HARM YOU.**

**THEY ARE NOT LIFE THREATENING AND IT WILL PASS. THE KEY IS TO STAY CALM AND BREATHE.**

## How to Deal with Panic Attacks?

### General Preventative Strategies

- [Practice relaxation techniques](#)
- Exercise regularly
- Avoid stimulants, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, drugs
- Learn about the causes of panic attacks
- Learn about the effects of panic attacks
- Try to figure out what triggers a panic attack
- Try to identify and challenge your negative thoughts by using the [Thoughts Log](#)

### Intervening during a Panic Attack

- When you feel panic building don't try to escape the situation
- Acknowledge to yourself what is happening, name it *"I am having a panic attack"*
- Repeat calming and supportive statements – *"This will pass; It's only anxiety; I am not going to faint, stop breathing, choke" etc.*
- Practice Thought Stopping – take a deep breath and say STOP to your thoughts, repeat several times
- Practice abdominal breathing or muscle relaxation. Breathe in slowly, count to three and breathe out slowly. Do this until you start to calm down
- Do something that requires focused attention like a simple repetitive activity (counting backwards); counting red cars
- Distract from the panic by moving around or doing something physical e.g. walking
- Imagine a calming place - [Visualisation](#)
- Remember this takes practice. Stick with it
- If your panic attacks continue, visit your GP for additional ways to manage them. Ask your GP about Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).
- See [www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie); [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie); [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

Further  
resources for  
anxiety and stress



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