



GOING THROUGH

# PANIC ATTACKS

*Explains what a panic attack is, what they can look & feel like and suggestions of how to manage them. Also includes a young person's personal experience and some other useful links and info.*

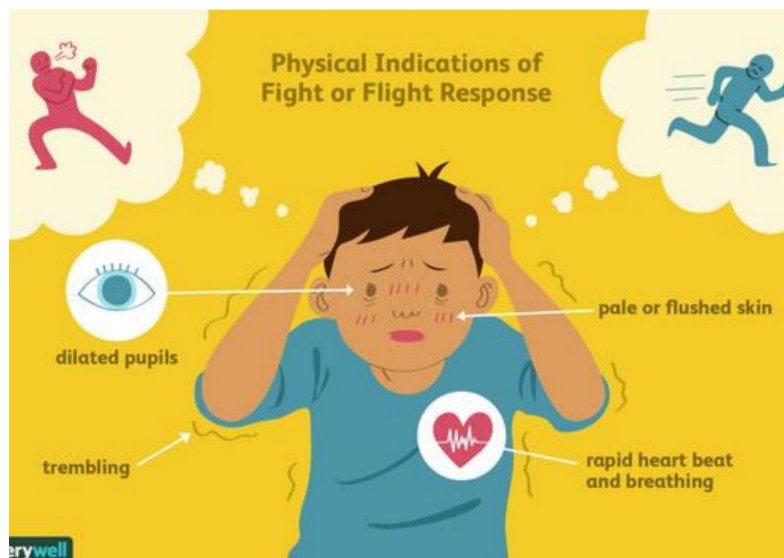
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## What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is a sudden and intense feeling of anxiety, it is an exaggerated fear response to danger, stress, or excitement.

A panic attack happens when the fight of flight response is triggered but there is no immediate danger, meaning you may experience a panic attack when watching tv or trying to go to sleep.

Here's how the fight or flight response works...



The fight-or-flight response (also known as the acute stress response), refers to a physiological reaction that occurs when we are in the presence of something that is terrifying (mentally or physically).

The fight-or-flight response is triggered by the release of hormones that prepare your body to either stay and deal with a threat or to run away to safety.

The term 'fight-or-flight' represents the choices that our ancient ancestors had when faced with danger in their environment, there is also a third F, freeze. They could either fight, flee or freeze. In either case, the physiological and psychological response to stress prepares the body to react to the danger

## *What does a panic attack feel like?*

Panic attacks can come in different ways and not one panic attack is necessarily alike another. But here are some common physical and psychological symptoms of panic attacks.

### *Physical:*

- Shaky- especially in the legs, finding it difficult to stay upright
- Feeling disorientated or dizzy
- Rapid heartrate, feeling like your heart is racing way too fast
- Temperature change- feeling either too hot or too cold
- Irregular breathing- feeling out of breath
- Nausea- feeling like you could vomit
- Excessive: sweating and/or trembling
- Dry mouth

### *Psychological - All related to being afraid, you may fear that you:*

- Aren't in reality
- Are losing control
- Are having a heart attack or going to faint/pass out
- Are going to die

### *When might this happen?*

Panic attacks can happen at any time and its different for everyone. Some people have regular panic attacks depending on locations, individuals, situations, activities etc...

Most panic attacks last between 5-20 minutes, they can often come on very quickly and as a surprise. The first 5-10 minutes of the panic attack are normally when your symptoms are at their worst.

## *How can I manage my anxiety?*

It is natural to avoid situations or triggers that make your anxiety worse. But sometimes you need to face up to things that make us anxious and come up with methods of coping so you don't have to avoid and could hopefully break the cycle of fear.

**Relaxation response:** Dr. Herbert Benson specialises in learning how people can counter the stress response by using a combination of approaches that elicit the relaxation response. These include deep abdominal breathing, focus on a soothing word (such as peace or calm), visualization of tranquil scenes, repetitive prayer, yoga, and tai chi.

Most of the research using objective measures to evaluate how effective the relaxation response is at countering chronic stress have been conducted in people with hypertension and other forms of heart disease. Those results suggest the technique may be worth trying — although for most people it is not a cure-all. For example, researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital conducted a double-blind, randomized controlled trial of 122 patients with hypertension, ages 55 and older, in which half were assigned to relaxation response training and the other half to a control group that received information about blood pressure control. After eight weeks, 34 of the people who practiced the relaxation response — a little more than half — had achieved a systolic blood pressure reduction of more than 5 mm Hg, and were therefore eligible for the next phase of the study, in which they could reduce levels of blood pressure medication they were taking. During that second phase, 50% were able to eliminate at least one blood pressure medication — significantly more than in the control group, where only 19% eliminated their medication.

**Physical activity:** People can use exercise to stifle the build-up of stress in several ways. Exercise, such as taking a brisk walk shortly after feeling stressed, not only deepens breathing but also helps relieve muscle tension. Movement therapies such as yoga, tai chi, and qi gong combine fluid movements with deep breathing and mental focus, all of which can induce calm.

**Social support:** Confidants, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, relatives, spouses, and companions all provide a life-enhancing social net — and may increase longevity. It's not clear why, but the buffering theory holds that people who enjoy close relationships with family and friends receive emotional support that indirectly helps to sustain them at times of chronic stress and crisis. Speaking to someone you trust can help, especially if they have been experiencing similar feelings.

**Keeping a diary:** Keeping a note of what happens each time you get anxious can help you spot patterns to your anxiety and maybe identify specific situations or triggers that bring your anxiety on. It can also help to keep a note of when you were able to successfully manage it.



## *How can I manage panic attacks?*

Panic attacks can happen anytime and for some people appear random, you may not always know why you are panicking so it's important to have some techniques to do when you feel a panic attack coming on, during a panic attack and how to take care of yourself afterwards.

### *If you feel a panic attack coming on:*

- 1. Use deep breathing:** If you can control your breathing, you are less likely to experience rapid out of control breathing (hyperventilation) that can make the attack or other symptoms worse. Focus on breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth and trying to make your exhale longer than your inhale.
- 2. Recognise that you are having a panic attack:** It is important to remind yourself that this is only temporary and will pass and you will be ok. Acknowledging your panic attack will reduce the fear of dying or passing out and can enable you to start focusing on your reducing techniques.
- 3. Closing your eyes:** Some panic attacks will be triggered by the situation you are in that it has overwhelmed you. To try and reduce any extra stimulus it can sometimes help to close your eyes so you can ground yourself and be aware of your surroundings.
- 4. Get to a safe place:** If you feel your panic attack coming on, take notice of your surroundings, can you leave quickly? Is there a safe and quiet place you can go? For example, leaving a shop or classroom and standing outside in the fresh air.

## *During a panic attack*

### **Breathing exercises:**

Deep breathing is a simple technique that is excellent for managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing effective, it is also discreet and easy to use at any time or place.

#### **4-7-8 Breathing**

1. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
2. Hold your **breath** for a count of seven.
3. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
4. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four **breaths**.

#### **Equal Time for Breathing in and Breathing Out**

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or in a chair.
2. **Breathe** in through your nose. As you do it, count to **five**.
3. **Breathe** out through your nose to the count of **five**
4. Repeat several times.

#### **5 star calm down breathing**

1. Spread your hand and stretch your fingers out like a star. You can choose your left hand or your right hand. Pretend the pointer finger of your other hand is a pencil and imagine you are going to trace around the outline of your hand and fingers.
2. Start at the bottom of your thumb and slide your finger up your thumb, pause at the top, and then slide your finger down the other side.
3. Place your pointer finger at the bottom of your thumb and breathe in as you slide up. Breathe out as you slide down. Breathe in as you slide up your second finger and breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your fingers and you have taken five slow breaths.



## Grounding Techniques

### The 5-4-3-2-1 technique:

Take a deep breath and...

1. Acknowledge five things that you can see around you.
2. Acknowledge four things that you can touch around you.
3. Acknowledge three things you can hear around you.
4. Acknowledge two things around you that you can smell.
5. Acknowledge one thing around you that you can taste.

### Take a Mindful SNACK

**Stop:** Just stop whatever you're doing. (Stopping, by definition, requires us to begin again.)

**Notice:** What is happening within and around you.

**Accept:** Whatever you're struggling with, acknowledge it for what it is, without judgment.

**Curious:** Ground yourself with questions about your experience and environment.

**Kindness:** Respond to yourself and others with kindness and observe how that helps things get back on track



## *Grounding Techniques*

### *Get your Self-Soothe Box out*

If you often have repeated feelings of panic, having a self-soothe or mood box is a great way to manage those feelings and help you feel more relaxed.

#### ***What should be in your self-soothe box?***

Each self-soothe box can be different and filled with things that are relevant to the individual and make you feel more positive.

Some ideas of where to start are to focus on having a range of sensory things in the box to enable you to focus your mind on.

You could include something you like the smell of or a smell that is calming, a popular choice is lavender. Something you could touch, examples could either be something soft and soothing to feel comforted or something to use for stress relief like a stress ball. Something you can look at, this could be a photograph, an old toy a book or poem something that brings you joy and makes you feel calm. Something to hear could be a favourite CD or DVD.

#### ***Additional ideas could be:***

**Calming technique cards:** A printout or postcard with some steady breathing techniques written on it. It acts as a reminder to keep calm and focused.

**Positive affirmation/quote cards:** This could be quotes from your favourite songs, films, books etc.. or might be a motivational quote that you've seen on social media.

**An activity:** Having an activity to complete can really help you self-soothe. Colouring as an example, is a very simple task and having something beautiful that you made can feel very rewarding. You might like to write about how you are feeling, or try some creative writing or poetry; for that you can include a pen and notepad.

The things that go into the box must help to change your mood when you are feeling panicked, tense or overwhelmed.





## ***After a panic attack***

Its important to pay attention to what your body needs after a panic attack and to carry out some self-care here are some good options:

### ***Take it slow***

Heartrate and breathing often speed up a lot during a panic attack and it is common for you to be thinking lots of thoughts quickly. Once your panic attack is over its good to take it slow; carry on taking deep breathes, sit down (if you can) and pausing what you were doing for at least 5 minutes. Panic attacks can leave you feeling tired and light-headed so take things one step at a time and don't rush into doing your next activity.

### ***Replenish***

Having a drink and/or something to eat can help. Drinking can be help ground and soothe you. Depending on what you need, hot drinks are more comforting but having a cold drink will feel more refreshing. Also, you may feel a little drained and out of energy after having a panic attack, you may feel a little better if you have something to eat to help boost your energy back up.

### ***Changing your environment***

If you are at home/a familiar place practising self-kindness by seeking comfort and reducing extra stimulation can be great after a panic attack. Something simple like changing into comfortable clothes or sitting under a blanket can help to make you feel safe and comforted. Panic attacks can often be brought on by too much stimulation, this could include lights from screens, tv, music, lots of different smells. Reducing this can help you to calm down e.g., put tv or phone volume down, have less lighting.

### ***Talk to someone and reflect***

After a panic attack it can be helpful to talk to someone you trust. This can also help you to process what has happened by talking about the situation, how your panic attack felt and how you were able to calm down. Reflecting about your panic attack can be helpful to knowing what to expect if it comes again and maybe recognising possible triggers that cause you to panic as well as noticing symptoms arising.



## *A young persons experience*

Kaitlyn, 15, shares what helps her when she has a panic attack.

I struggle with panic attacks. Before they begin, I usually feel like there are too many voices and they're all trying to talk at once and it gets messy. Sometimes I don't need overlapping voices to panic - really big crowds make me panicky too. When I'm having a panic attack, I cry, and I become really quiet.

I struggle with talking about my feelings. Usually, I just write them down and hide away. That's what I do at school. Whenever I feel panicky, I leave my group of friends and go to this small corner that's tucked away out of sight from anyone and, once I'm there, I can cry, I can read, I can write, I can have peace.

Over the years, I have been given pieces of advice that have helped me to cope with my panic attacks. One of the main ones I use is a way of focusing your mind and calming down; what you do is name five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. I repeat this over and over again until I have calmed down.

Usually after doing this five senses exercises, I work on my breathing - I focus on breathing in slowly, then breathing out slowly.

Another thing that helps me with my panic attacks is music. When I have an attack, I just stick my headphones in, close my eyes and blast my music. I know people say that I will damage my ears if I have my music up too loud, so I'm careful, but there's something about drowning the world out and concentrating on the beat of the music that calms me down.

I also find it really helpful to have some time alone. That's why it helps to know that I always have my little corner at school, and my bedroom at home.

It can be hard to manage my mental health at school, because sometimes I feel as though my teachers and friends don't understand. But there are some people who I know will understand and that I trust enough to talk to. One of them is my English teacher; she seems to understand me, and I trust her, which is very rare as I find it difficult to trust people.

I hope some of these methods help you as well. Just remember that if you're struggling with anxiety or panic attacks, you're not alone and there are people who will understand and help you.

**Author: Kaitlyn, 15**



## *Helpful Information*

### **APPS:**

**WorryTree:** WorryTree's mission is to help make a positive difference to your daily life, providing supportive, useful tools for you to manage your worries in a better way, transforming your thought habits for the long-term benefit of your mental wellbeing.

**Calm:** Especially if anxiety can interfere with sleep. Has meditation and sleep stories, relaxing music to ease your stress.

**Headspace:** Everyday mindfulness and meditation for Stress, Anxiety, Sleep, Focus, Fitness and more.

**SAM:** Self-help anxiety management app

**What's up:** free app utilising some CBT and ACT methods to help cope with anxiety, depression, anger, stress and more.

**MindShift:** provides resources to help manage anxiety including healthier thinking, a chill out zone and taking action.

## Helpful Information

### Websites Mind

**Mind:** [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem

**Young Minds:** [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk) to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

[https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-stress/\(stress with exams\)](https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/school-college-and-work/school-college/exam-stress/(stress-with-exams)) <https://www.childline.org.uk/globalassets/info-and-advice/school-work-and-college/school-and-college/exam-stress/beat-exam-stress.pdf> (pdf Beat exam stress

Info to deal with anxiety <https://www.anxietybc.com/anxiety-PDF-documents>

### tools to cope with anxiety:

<http://youth.anxietybc.com/>

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk>

<http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp/>

Radio 4 program how to manage your anxiety (Video how to manage worries)

video [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03rwr72?intc\\_type=singletheme&intc\\_location=radio4&intc\\_campaign=radio4infour&intc\\_linkname=vidclip\\_manageworries\\_contentcard3](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03rwr72?intc_type=singletheme&intc_location=radio4&intc_campaign=radio4infour&intc_linkname=vidclip_manageworries_contentcard3) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03rwr72?intc\\_type=singletheme&intc\\_location=radio4&intc\\_campaign=radio4infour&intc\\_linkname=vidclip\\_manageworries\\_contentcard3](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03rwr72?intc_type=singletheme&intc_location=radio4&intc_campaign=radio4infour&intc_linkname=vidclip_manageworries_contentcard3)

**Mood juice:** (selfhelp with anger/anxiety/social anxiety/stress....)

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk>

**Mood gym:** <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome/new/splash>

**Think you know:** (advise how to stay safe with social media) <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk> No More Panic [nomorepanic.co.uk](http://nomorepanic.co.uk): Provides information, support and advice for those with panic disorder, anxiety, phobias or OCD, including a forum and chat room.

**No Panic:** 0300 7729844. [nopic.org.uk](http://nopic.org.uk)- Provides a helpline, step-by-step programmes, and support for people with anxiety disorders.

**Samaritans:** 116 123 (freephone) [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) Chris, Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK PO Box 90 90 Stirling FK8 2SA [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)