



Panic Attacks

When anxiety strikes

Is there a cure?

Poor diet and sleep, too much coffee, use of recreational drugs or a general inattention to self-care can predispose us to panic attacks. Longer term solutions like counselling usually involve trying to understand the reasons behind them occurring.

Counselling and Assertiveness Training

Talking to someone who appreciates the difficulties involved can help us understand the situation better. Exploring one's own experience of panic can feel daunting but is a normal and necessary part of the therapeutic process and in most cases improvement quickly follows.

Similarly, learning to be more assertive can help build confidence, self-esteem and feelings of control which can reduce the severity and frequency of panic attacks.

Some useful websites

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Panic-disorder>
NHS Choices website

<http://www.mind.org.uk>
MIND, the UK charity for mental health issues

Remember, no referral is needed to make an appointment with **EAP** and our counsellors are all experienced in dealing with the difficulties associated with panic and anxiety.

EAP take a step forward
01225 82 5960 / 4484



Employee Assistance Programme

Panic attacks are **not** regarded as being physically harmful and are rarely associated with serious illness however they can have a profound effect on everyday life as we increasingly avoid situations associated with their onset. Although we might feel as if we are 'going mad' panic attacks are **not** the product of a deranged mind; instead they are **natural reactions** which, from time to time, can become over-intense.

What are Panic Attacks?

Most of us can experience 'nerves' or anxiety when faced with a demanding or exciting situation. For example: when anticipating a driving test, appraisal, aeroplane flight or public speaking. These feelings are part of our natural survival response to a perceived threat. Where the threat is immediate our bodies produce adrenaline which equips us to deal with the situation. In most cases, like when crossing a busy road, the feeling of anxiety quickly passes as the threat subsides and we make it safely to the opposite side.

However, **panic attacks** can occur when we *suddenly* experience *intense* feelings of anxiety over a period of a few minutes. Initially these attacks appear shocking and unpredictable because they seem to begin without warning. Where panic attacks become associated with specific situations, like eating in a crowded restaurant, a repetitive pattern can be established.

Physical Symptoms

- ❖ Chest pains
- ❖ Heart palpitations
- ❖ Sweating

- ❖ Trembling
- ❖ Dizziness/feeling faint
- ❖ Light-headedness
- ❖ Feeling 'spaced out' and detached
- ❖ Nausea
- ❖ Dry mouth and difficulty swallowing
- ❖ Diarrhoea
- ❖ Rapid, shallow breathing
- ❖ Pins and needles and a feeling of weakness

What can I do?

There are several approaches to dealing with panic attacks. In the immediate crisis of an attack the following can be helpful:

- ❖ 7/11 breathing is a calming way of breathing using abdominal muscles. There is a count of 7 with the in-breath and 11 on the outbreath. The counting should be even, so that the outbreath is longer. This simple intervention triggers a relaxation response and can be done for a few minutes at a time. It's best to practise this first before trying it when a panic attack occurs.
- ❖ For hyperventilation (fast, shallow breathing) use a paper (not plastic) bag over the mouth and nose for a couple of minutes and breathe into this.

It is possible to learn other strategies to interrupt the growing feelings of anxiety before a full-blown panic attack occurs. It's best to practise these regularly so they are easy to do when needed. These include: relaxation training to reduce physical tension and developing the capacity to think differently about what is happening as our thoughts can powerfully affect our physical responses. Contact us at EAP if you would like help to develop these skills.