



Panic Disorder

Symptoms of a Panic Attack:

- racing or producing heartbeat
- chest pains
- dizziness, lightheadedness, nausea
- tingling or numbness in the hands
- flushes or chills
- dreamlike sensations or perceptual distortions
- terror - a sense that something unimaginably horrible is about to occur and one is powerless to prevent it
- fear of losing control and doing something embarrassing
- fear of dying

Facts About Panic Attacks

A panic attack represents an intense level of anxiety and is one of the most distressing conditions that a person can experience.

Most people who have one attack will have others. When someone has repeated attacks, or feels severe anxiety about having another attack, they are said to have a panic disorder.

Panic disorder is a serious health problem in this country. At least 1.6 percent of adult Americans, or three million people, will have panic disorder at some time in their lives.

Panic attacks are different from other types of anxiety in that they are sudden, appear to be unprovoked and are often disabling.

Once someone has had a panic attack, for example, while driving, shopping in a crowded store, or riding in an elevator - he or she may develop irrational fears, called phobias, about these situations and begin to avoid them. Eventually, the pattern of avoidance and level of anxiety about another attack may reach the point where the individual with panic disorder may be unable to drive or even step out of the house. At this stage, the person is said to have panic disorder with agoraphobia.

Because of the disturbing symptoms that accompany panic disorder, it may be mistaken for heart disease or some other life-threatening medical illness. People frequently go to hospital emergency rooms when they are having a panic attack, and extensive medical tests may be performed to rule out these other conditions.



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Treatment of Panic Attacks

Panic disorder can be controlled with specific treatments including several effective medications and also specific forms of psychotherapy.

Often, a combination of psychotherapy and medications produce good results. Improvement is usually noticed in a fairly short period of time - about six to eight weeks. Thus appropriate treatment for panic disorder can prevent panic attacks or at least substantially reduce their severity and frequency - bringing significant relief to 70 to 90 percent of people with panic disorder.

People with panic disorder may need treatment for other emotional problems. Depression has often been associated with panic disorder, as have alcohol and drug abuse. Recent research also suggests that suicide attempts are more frequent in people with panic disorder. Fortunately, these problems associated with panic disorder can be overcome effectively, just like panic disorder itself.