

PANIC ATTACK

Emergency Guide

What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is when you experience a rush of intense fear or physical symptoms and it can appear very quickly and suddenly without the presence of a real danger or threat. Panic attacks can be very frightening and distressing.



How do I know if I'm having a panic attack?

Symptoms of a panic attack can include:

- Sense of impending danger (for example, you feel like you're experiencing a heart attack)
- Increased or pounding heart
- Feeling very hot or very cold (chills)
- Shaking/shivering
- Sweating
- Feeling light-headed or dizzy
- Nausea
- Stomach pain
- Chest pain
- Tingly or numb hands
- Difficulty breathing
- Rapid breathing/hyperventilation
- Feeling disconnected from your body (dissociation)
- Fear of losing control

A panic attack typically lasts 5 to 15 minutes. Any symptoms experienced after 15 minutes are symptoms of anxiety and not a panic attack.

Remember, Panic attacks can be scary and intensely uncomfortable but they are not harmful or life-threatening.

How can I manage a panic attack?

The following steps suggest how to manage a panic attack:

1. Acknowledge that you are having a panic attack.
2. Accept that you are experiencing a panic attack and that it will eventually and gradually pass.
3. Recognize the physical symptoms you are feeling associated with the panic attack, such as increased heart rate. Try to implement the five senses technique (see below).
4. Remember that these symptoms are part of the flight and fight response that humans will experience when we sense danger. For example, when our body perceives a threat, our brain triggers adrenaline release (fast acting stress chemical) which changes symptoms in our body such as heart palpitations.

Adrenaline increases the heart rate and depth of breathing, which can be experienced as difficulty in breathing or in some cases, hyperventilation, that can cause tingling sensations, dizziness and confusion. You may also, start sweating to get rid of the extra body heat. Adrenaline increases the blood supply to the muscles so that we can be able to run and decreases blood supply to digestive system which can cause nausea and discomfort.

- Change your environment: if possible, exit the place you're currently in. For example, if you are sitting in your office, exit to the living room. Changing your environment can help decrease the panic attack.



FIVE SENSES TECHNIQUE

The five senses technique is a grounding strategy that allows a person to focus on their external environment and not on their internal environment. The five senses technique can help reduce physical symptoms and overthinking associated with a panic attack by activating the other senses.

Remember, it's not a test of how much you can notice. We recommend completing the exercise slowly while concentrating. You can repeat the exercise as many times until you feel calmer.

To complete the five senses technique, please follow the following steps while maintaining deep breathing:



Note five things around you that you can **See** (for example: a brown velvet couch, a wooden table, a beige computer chair, a white frame with a picture of the ocean and a white A/C).



Note four things around you that you can **Feel** in the body (for example: you can feel your feet on the ground, your iced coffee, the velvet material of a couch and your glasses on your face. This does not include emotions).



Note three things that you can **Hear** (for example: a car honk in the distance, the humming of an A/C and a person typing on a keyboard. Try to choose three different sounds).



Note two things you can **Smell** (for example, a lavender candle and the smell of a fresh jar of coffee).



Note one thing you can **Taste** (for example, coffee). If you haven't eaten anything, you can remember a taste you enjoy in general, such as cake.