

Panic Attacks: Care Instructions



Overview

During a panic attack, you may have a feeling of intense fear or terror, trouble breathing, chest pain or tightness, heartbeat changes, dizziness, sweating, and shaking. A panic attack starts suddenly and usually lasts from 5 to 20 minutes but may last even longer. An attack can begin with a stressful event. Or it can happen without a cause.

Although panic attacks can cause scary symptoms, you can learn to manage them with self-care, counseling, and medicine.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Take your medicine exactly as directed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Go to your counseling sessions and follow-up appointments.
- Recognize and accept your anxiety. Then, when you are in a situation that makes you anxious, say to yourself, "This is not an emergency. I feel uncomfortable, but I am not in danger. I can keep going even if I feel anxious."
- Be kind to your body:
 - Relieve tension with exercise or a massage.
 - Get enough rest.
 - Avoid alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and illegal drugs. They can increase your anxiety level, cause sleep problems, or trigger a panic attack.
 - Learn and do relaxation techniques. See below for more about these techniques.

- Engage your mind. Get out and do something you enjoy. Go to a funny movie, or take a walk or hike. Plan your day. Having too much or too little to do can make you anxious.
- Keep a record of your symptoms. Discuss your fears with a good friend or family member, or join a support group for people with similar problems. Talking to others sometimes relieves stress.
- Get involved in social groups, or volunteer to help others. Being alone sometimes makes things seem worse than they are.
- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week to relieve stress. Walking is a good choice. You also may want to do other activities, such as running, swimming, cycling, or playing tennis or team sports.

Relaxation techniques

Do relaxation exercises for 10 to 20 minutes a day. You can play soothing, relaxing music while you do them, if you wish.

- Tell others in your house that you are going to do your relaxation exercises. Ask them not to disturb you.
- Find a comfortable place, away from all distractions and noise.
- Lie down on your back, or sit with your back straight.
- Focus on your breathing. Make it slow and steady.
- Breathe in through your nose. Breathe out through either your nose or mouth.
- Breathe deeply, filling up the area between your navel and your rib cage. Breathe so that your belly goes up and down.
- Do not hold your breath.
- Breathe like this for 5 to 10 minutes. Notice the feeling of calmness throughout your whole body.

As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, relax by doing the following for another 5 to 10 minutes:

- Tighten and relax each muscle group in your body. You can begin at your toes and work your way up to your head.
- Imagine your muscle groups relaxing and becoming heavy.
- Empty your mind of all thoughts.
- Let yourself relax more and more deeply.
- Become aware of the state of calmness that surrounds you.
- When your relaxation time is over, you can bring yourself back to alertness by moving your fingers and toes and then your hands and feet and then stretching and moving your entire body. Sometimes people fall asleep during relaxation, but they usually wake up shortly afterward.
- Always give yourself time to return to full alertness before you drive a car or do anything that might cause an accident if you are not fully alert. Never play a relaxation tape while driving a car.

When should you call for help?



Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You feel you cannot stop from hurting yourself or someone else.

Where to get help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

If you or someone you know talks about suicide, self-harm, a mental health crisis, a substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress, get help right away. You can:

- Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**.
- Call **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.
- Text **HOME to 741741** to access the Crisis Text Line.

Consider saving these numbers in your phone.

Go to **988lifeline.org** for more information or to chat online.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your panic attacks get worse.
- You have new or different anxiety.
- You are not getting better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/patiented>

Enter **H601** in the search box to learn more about "**Panic Attacks: Care Instructions**".

©2006-2023 Healthwise, Incorporated.

This care instruction is for use with your licensed healthcare professional. If you have questions about a medical condition or this instruction, always ask your healthcare professional. Healthwise, Incorporated disclaims any warranty or liability for your use of this information.