

Panic Disorder

A panic attack is a sudden rush of intense fear or discomfort that is accompanied by symptoms such as heart palpitations, racing or pounding; difficulty breathing; trembling or shaking; chest pain or discomfort; stomach distress; dizziness or light-headedness; numbing or tingling. During a panic attack, people often feel afraid that they are dying or going crazy or that they may do something that is out of their control.

People who have Panic Disorder have recurrent, unexpected panic attacks. Over time, the panic attacks may become predictable and may be expected, but at some point, they seemed to come from “out of the blue.” Although most people will experience a panic attack at some point, people with Panic Disorder worry a great deal about having more panic attacks and often do things to try to prevent more panic attacks from happening. For example, people with Panic Disorder may avoid exercise or being in places that make them hot because they are afraid that if their hearts start beating faster during exercise or if they feel hot and start sweating, they may experience a panic attack. Avoidance of activities that may trigger a panic attack can significantly limit a person’s life.

People with Panic Disorder may also find themselves avoiding situations that may be difficult to leave if they experience a panic attack, or where it may be difficult to get help. For example, they may avoid public transportation, crowds, driving or riding as a passenger in a car, movie theatres, small spaces, or open spaces, among other situations. When people avoid situations because they are afraid they will have a panic attack, they may be experiencing Panic Disorder with Agoraphobia. People with Panic Disorder who experience severe Agoraphobia may avoid leaving their homes for days, weeks, months, or years.

Screening

- Have you had more than one sudden rush of intense fear or discomfort?
- When it happened did you also experience heart racing or pounding, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, sweating, or dizziness? A
- re you very worried about having more panic attacks?
- Have you changed anything that you do to try to prevent more panic attacks from happening?
- Do you avoid situations because you are afraid you won’t be able to leave or get help if you have a panic attack?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of these questions, you may consider speaking with your physician or mental health professional about your concerns.