

# PANIC ATTACK

What is a  
**PANIC ATTACK?**



## What is a panic attack?

Everyone knows what panic is, and it is common to feel panicky from time to time:

- you discover you have had your wallet stolen
- you are sitting an exam. You look at the paper and realise you don't know the answers to any of the questions

It would be normal in either of these situations to feel a sense of panic. This feeling would pass fairly quickly.

A **panic attack** is a bit like 'normal' panic, but different in certain ways:

- the feelings seem to come 'out of the blue' and are not usually related to the sort of frightening situation described above
- the feelings are a lot stronger

It is because the feelings are **unexpected** and **strong** that they can be extremely frightening.

The truth is: **nothing** awful is going to happen, because panic attacks are **not** dangerous.

Lots of people have panic attacks. They are **not** signs of serious mental or physical illness. Panic affects your body, your mind and the way you behave, but in different ways for different people.

Here is a list of some of the things that can happen to people having a panic attack. Some people have all of the symptoms, others just a few.

## Your body

- difficulty in breathing
- racing heart
- tingling sensations
- sweating
- dizziness
- chest pains
- shaking

## Your mind

- feelings of utter terror
- feelings of unreality, as though you're not really there

## Frightening thoughts such as:

- "I'm going to have a heart attack"
- "I will collapse or faint"
- "I'm running out of air"
- "I'm going mad"
- "I'm losing control"
- "I'm going to make a complete fool of myself"
- "I've got to get out of here"

## Your behaviour

- you try to leave the situation as quickly as possible
- you avoid the situation in the future

All of the panic symptoms described above are simply an extreme form of fear. Fear is our body's natural response to a situation we see as dangerous.

Fear is very useful. It prepares your body for action. This has been called the '**fight or flight**' response. When you feel fear, your body is preparing to fight or run away. When you are frightened, you:

- breathe more quickly so that you can get lots of oxygen to your muscles
- your heart beats faster to pump the blood faster round your body
- your digestive system slows down so that your body can focus on the more immediate threat

This is your body's normal healthy reaction to situations where your body feels under threat. It is your body's alarm system.

The problem with panic attacks is that they usually occur when there is no clear physical threat at all. Your body is reacting as though it is about to be attacked when in reality it is not.

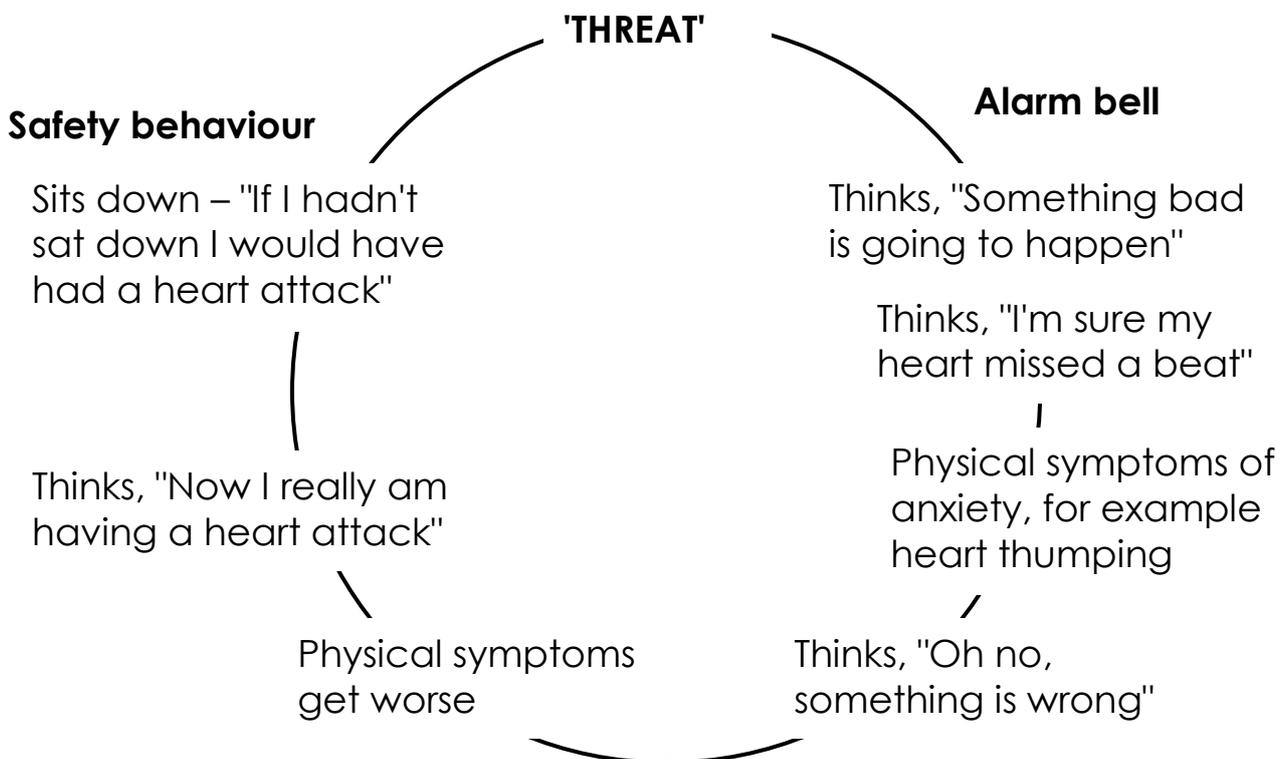
## What causes panic attacks to begin?

Panic attacks can happen for a number of reasons:

- stress
- health worries
- during a mild illness
- because of strong emotions
- out of the blue

## What keeps panic attacks going?

Panic affects your body, your thoughts and your behaviour. All three work together to keep panic going.



## What techniques can help me cope with and reduce panic attacks?

The good news is that panic attacks are very treatable. You may find that your panic attacks have already started to reduce because you have begun to recognise and understand, and accept that they are not harmful.

Panic affects your body, your mind and your behaviour. By learning to change in each of these areas you can learn to cope with panic attacks.

*For more detail, please see leaflet PANIC: A Self Help Guide.*

### Further help

If you feel you may need professional help, talk to your GP who might be able to provide this or who may refer you on to someone else who can.

### Some useful helplines

**No Panic** – confidential helpline  
Helpline (Daily 10am – 10pm) 0844 967 4848  
Youth Helpline  
(13-20yr olds – Mon-Fri 3pm – 6pm) 0330 606 1174

**Samaritans** - confidential support for anyone in a crisis  
National Helpline (24 hours a day) Tel: 116 123  
Borders Tel: 01750 20000 (local rate)  
E-mail Helpline [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) (answer within 24 hours)  
Local Branch 21 West Port, Selkirk, TD7 4DG

**Living Life** – Appointment-based telephone support based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for anyone over the age of 16 experiencing low mood and/or anxiety  
Monday-Friday (1pm-9pm) Tel: 0800 328 9655

## **Panic Websites**

[www.nopanic.org.uk](http://www.nopanic.org.uk)

Comprehensive help for panic and associated conditions. Includes telephone and written recovery programmes.

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/panic-attacks-and-panic-disorders.htm>

Information on panic disorder with some self-help tips for panic attacks

## **Useful Books**

Butler, G, Grey, N, and Hope, T (2018) *Manage Your Mind, Third Edition* Oxford

ISBN: 978-0198747277

An excellent self-help textbook with chapters on all major problem areas and a good Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and problem solving approach. (Section 6 (25) is particularly relevant)

Jeffers, Susan (2007) *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* Vermilion (reprinted 2007) ISBN: 978-0091907075 (Easy to read. Encourages acceptance and a change in attitude.) Also available in audio format

Manicavasagar, Vijaya & Silove, Derrick (2017) *Overcoming Panic, Second Edition* Robinson ISBN: 978-1472135827

A step-by-step guide on how manage panic disorder. Based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Trickett, S (2009) *Coping Successfully with Panic Attacks* Reissue Sheldon Press ISBN: 978-1847090713 Weekes, Claire (2015) *Self Help for your Nerves* Harpercollins ISBN: 978-0722531556 Emphasises coping with physical aspects of anxiety and panic)

## **Apps for mobile phone and tablets**

A range of self-help apps are available for your mobile phone and tablet. Some of these apps are free of charge, whilst others have a cost attached depending on the developer. Please use the link below to view some suggested self-help apps for different mental health problems:

<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>

*To cut out and keep:*



### **Coping with Panic THINGS TO REMEMBER**

- The feelings are **normal** bodily reactions; they are **not** harmful
- Do not add frightening thoughts, describe what is happening
- Wait for the feelings to pass
- Plan what to do next, then start off slowly

## **Booklets/leaflets available on the following:**

Agoraphobia  
Anger  
Anxiety  
Bereavement  
Depression  
Hyperventilation  
Loss  
OCD  
Panic (long version)  
How to solve problems: a simple DIY technique  
Relaxation  
Self-Esteem  
Self-Harm  
Self-Help Websites  
Sleep  
Stress  
Trauma  
Worry

Copies of any of the above booklets are available to download/print at:

[nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/wellbeing](https://nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/wellbeing)

S Black, R Donald, M Henderson 2005  
NHS Borders

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[www.wellontheweb.net](http://www.wellontheweb.net)*

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