



# MANAGING A PANIC ATTACK

## WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?

Panic attacks are sudden onset moments of fear and/or discomfort that escalate and reach their peak within minutes. They are often differentiated from other anxiety symptoms by the high intensity and short duration of the attack.

These attacks can happen in calm or anxious states and have specific symptoms to identify; however, these symptoms are very similar to other anxiety symptoms and those of a heart attack.

Panic attacks are usually quick and pass in a short amount of time, typically a few minutes. Some heart attacks are intense and quick, but most start slowly with mild discomfort and do not go away without being treated by a medical professional.



*More than 1 in 5 people experience a panic attack during their lifetime. Panic attacks can be extremely uncomfortable and frightening. However, panic attacks pass and can be managed.*

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING A PANIC ATTACK

1. Reference the symptom and signs comparison to determine that you are experiencing a panic attack and reassure yourself that it will pass.
2. Practice breathing techniques such as breathing in through your nose for 5 seconds and out through your mouth for 5 seconds.
3. Focus on your breathing by closing your eyes. Try to relax your body while you tune in to your 5 senses to help ground you.
4. Once the attack is over and you feel better, consult with a healthcare professional to help prevent and manage future attacks.



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



### PANIC ATTACK

Accelerated Heart Rate  
 Pounding Heart  
 Heart Palpitations  
 Sweating  
 Shaking  
 Dizziness  
 Shortness of Breath  
 Smothering Sensations  
 Feelings of Choking  
 Chest Pain  
 Nausea  
 Chills  
 Hot Flashes  
 Numbness  
 Tingling Sensation  
 Fear of Losing Control  
 Fear of Dying

VS.



### HEART ATTACK

Sudden Cardiac Arrest  
 Chest Pain Lasting Longer Than a Few Minutes  
 Shortness of Breath  
 Cold Sweats  
 Nausea  
 Heart Burn  
 Dizziness  
 Pain or Discomfort in Other Parts of the Body:  
 One or both arms  
 Neck  
 Back  
 Jaw  
 Stomach

## ACTION STEPS TO SUPPORT SOMEONE EXPERIENCING A PANIC ATTACK

1. Determine if it is a panic attack or heart attack by evaluating the warning signs being displayed. Ask if they've experienced these symptoms in the past.
2. If the person says they are having a panic attack, ask if they'd like your help and then ask, "how can I best support you?"
3. Remain calm and reassure them of your support. Stay with them until the panic passes if possible.
4. Calmly acknowledge their fear and reassure them that panic attack symptoms will pass.
5. Don't call attention to their breathing, instead model a steady breathing rate, or have them count to 10 slowly with you.
6. When the panic attack is over, encourage them use self-care and to seek professional support to help educate them, manage, and treat future panic attacks.

**If you or the person you are helping is experiencing a heart attack, can't determine if it is a heart attack, or if immediate help is needed, call 911 immediately. If the person loses consciousness, follow first aid protocol.**

Sources: Anxiety & Depression Association of America, American Heart Association, and Mental Health First Aid

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