

## PANIC - FACTSHEET

# HOW TO DEAL WITH PANIC

## What is Panic and Panic Attacks?

It is common to feel 'panicky' from time to time. Some examples include if you narrowly avoid a car accident, or you discover your wallet has been stolen. Those feelings are understandable and pass fairly quickly.

A panic attack is a bit like 'normal' panic, but is a strong feeling of terror that comes on very suddenly. Physical symptoms include a pounding heart, fast breathing, shaking, feeling sick or faint and wobbly legs. People can also have frightening thoughts that something awful is happening eg that they are having a heart attack, that they can't breathe, or that they need to get out of where they are.



Having a panic attack is actually quite common, and they are not dangerous nor are they a sign of serious mental or physical illness.

## What Causes Panic and Panic Attacks?

Panic is an extreme form of fear. Fear is the body's natural alarm system signalling danger. When you feel fear, the body is preparing to fight or run away from the thing it feels threatened by, or to stay completely still and wait for it to pass.

This is the "fight or flight" response. In the case of panic there is no actual physical danger - it's a false alarm and the things people fear in a panic attack never actually happen. Panic attacks can begin for various reasons such as stress, health worries, difficult emotions, a mild illness or out of the blue.

They are kept going due to the vicious cycle of its associated physical symptoms, thoughts and behaviours.

## Tips for Overcoming Panic and Panic Attacks

- Relaxation and slow controlled breathing can help, try using an app or a guided recording.
- Also distraction and thought challenging techniques are helpful. Best to practise and learn these when you aren't anxious. Try to sort out any worries or troubles that you have. Get support and talk about them, rather than sweeping them under the carpet.
- Remind yourself during panic that you've panicked many times before and nothing awful is going to happen.
- Try not to take measures to avoid, escape or prevent panic attacks. Try instead to test out what really happens eg work out what things you tend to do to try to keep yourself safe from panic, and experiment with choosing not to do them in small, planned ways, and notice what happens.
- By testing your fears and discovering for yourself that your worst fear never happens, you will gradually become more confident and your panic attacks will tend to diminish in frequency and intensity.

## Summary

Panic is an extreme form of fear and fear is the body's natural alarm system warning you of danger. If feelings of panic are coming out of the blue and are highly intense, and affecting your physical and mental health, then there are steps you can take as described above to help you cope and get better by yourself, though at times you may need some professional support. Remember, having a panic attack is actually quite common, and they are not dangerous nor are they a sign of serious mental or physical illness.

As some non-serious medical conditions can cause panic attack-like symptoms, eg the combination of certain medicines, thyroid problems, too much caffeine, pregnancy and low blood sugar, it may be worth having a check-up with your GP if after reading this, you think your problem may have a physical cause.

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# ADDITIONAL EAP RESOURCES

If you feel uncontrollably panicked, remember to contact the EAP service on 1300 878 379. If you are in a crisis situation please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or emergency services on 000.

For more information, visit our website at [www.veretis.com.au](http://www.veretis.com.au) or see our additional resources available at [veretis.com.au/eap](http://veretis.com.au/eap)