

PANIC ATTACK

PATIENT & CARER INFORMATION LEAFLET

Please take the time to read this leaflet and keep it in a safe place



A PANIC ATTACK is a severe attack of anxiety and fear which occurs suddenly, often without warning, and for no apparent reason. Various other symptoms then occur during a panic attack. These include one or more of the following:

- Palpitations or a thumping heart
- Sweating and trembling
- Hot flushes or chills
- Feeling short of breath, sometimes with choking sensations
- Feeling sick
- Feeling dizzy, or faint
- Fear of dying or going crazy
- Numbness, or pins and needles
- Feelings of unreality, or being detached from yourself

The physical symptoms that occur with panic attacks do not mean there is a physical problem with the heart, chest, etc. The symptoms mainly occur because of an 'overdrive' of nervous impulses from the brain to various parts of the body during a panic attack.

During a panic attack you tend to over-breathe (hyperventilate). If you over-breathe you 'blow out' too much carbon dioxide which changes the acidity in the blood. This can then cause more symptoms such as confusion and cramps, and make palpitations, dizziness, and pins and needles worse. This can make the attack seem even more frightening, and make you over-breathe even more, and so on.

A panic attack usually lasts 5-10 minutes, but sometimes they come in 'waves' for up to two hours.

WHO GETS PANIC ATTACKS?

At least 1 in 10 people have occasional panic attacks. They tend to occur most in young adults. Twice as many women than men have panic attacks. Anyone can have a panic attack, but they also tend to run in some families.

WHAT CAUSES PANIC ATTACKS?

Panic attacks usually occur for no apparent reason. The cause is not clear. Stressful life events such as a bereavement may sometimes trigger a panic attack.

DEALING WITH A PANIC ATTACK

To ease a panic attack, or to prevent one from getting worse:

- Breathe as slowly and as deeply as you can. Concentrate on your breathing
- You may find it beneficial to contact a family member or friend to support, reassure and assist you to concentrate on and get control of your breathing

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR A PANIC ATTACK?

No regular treatment is needed if you have just an occasional panic attack. You may find it helpful to:

- Understand about panic attacks, and the cause of the symptoms
- Know that any physical symptoms which occur do not mean that you have a serious disease. For example, some people find it helpful to know that the pins and needles they had during a panic attack are due to acidity changes in the blood
- Know how to deal with a panic attack (see above)

If you have frequent or recurring panic attacks, this is called panic disorder. Treatment to prevent panic attacks is an option if you develop panic disorder. See your GP for more information on panic disorders.

WHO TO CONTACT

If your condition gets worse in any way contact one of the following...

Your Doctor

During normal surgery hours contact your doctor.

NHS24

When your GP practice is closed and you can't wait until it opens call NHS24 on 08454 24 24 24.

When you need reliable information about illnesses and conditions, NHS Services and current health issues call 0800 22 44 88 or visit www.NHS24.com

999

In an emergency dial 999 or 112 and ask the operator for an ambulance response. Always call an ambulance if you think your illness or injury is life threatening. If you are at all unsure, call 999.

YOUR VIEWS ARE IMPORTANT TO US

Let us know how we can improve the service. We need you to tell us about your experiences, good or bad, and how you would like to see our services improved.

Have an opinion or suggestion? Let us know...

Tel: 0131 4467000

Fax: 0131 4467001

Email: scotamb.corporateaffairs@nhs.net

Write to: Scottish Ambulance Service, Corporate Affairs Manager,
Tipperlinn Road, Edinburgh EH10 5UU

This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats on request. On occasions a summary will be provided. Please contact the corporate affairs team via email or the telephone number above who will then deal with your request.

To download a copy of this leaflet visit:
www.scottishambulance.com

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