



Panic Attack



Overview

This is an intense feeling of fear and anxiety. It overwhelms you. It can happen without warning, and you may have no idea why it's happening. A panic attack isn't harmful, but it is a very unpleasant experience.

Causes

We don't understand the exact cause of panic attacks. They may be linked to a problem with the way your brain responds to stress and fear. If you have depression, or if you abuse alcohol or drugs, you may be more prone to have panic attacks. If you have panic attacks regularly, you may have an anxiety disorder we call "panic disorder."

Symptoms

Symptoms of a panic attack include an overwhelming feeling of fear and anxiety. You may feel that you have lost control. You may feel that you are going to die. You may have physical symptoms, too. Your heart may race, your chest may hurt and you may have trouble breathing. You may tremble and sweat, and you may have chills. You may feel nausea, weakness or dizziness. Your hands may feel numb or tingly. If you have panic attacks repeatedly you may have intense worries about when the next one will happen. You may find yourself avoiding places where you have had an attack.

Treatment

A panic attack will not hurt you, but if panic attacks are interfering with your life, you may benefit from medications. Panic attacks can also be treated with talk therapy, which can help you learn to control them. Your healthcare provider can create a plan that's right for you.

Actor portrayals in photos

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