

Treatment

Treatment of panic disorder involves a combination of different methods. The most common methods are:

- Patient Education-Patients learn how to understand and manage their disorder.
- Behavior Therapy-Patients are exposed to situations that provoke a panic attack and then they are taught the proper way to deal with the panic or anxiety they are feeling.
- Medication-The most common type of medication prescribed by a doctor to people living with panic disorder is antidepressants. These are used to help to reduce the occurrence of panic attacks.

What is the Difference between Panic Attacks and Panic Disorder?

- Panic attacks are very common and having one doesn't mean you have panic disorder. For example, if you are feeling very stressed or tired and have a panic attack, this doesn't mean you have panic disorder.
- Panic attacks only become a problem if you are worried about having more attacks, or if you're afraid that something bad will happen because of an attack.

- Also, it is common for people with other anxiety disorders to have panic attacks, and this is not panic disorder. For example, people with a phobia of dogs might have a panic attack whenever they are near a dog. But in this case, the panic attack is expected, and the panic attack is expected because the person is afraid of the dog, not afraid of the panic attack. In panic disorder, the panic attacks are unexpected and unpredictable.

The Facts

- Panic attacks are quite common. In fact, one out of every three adults will experience a panic attack in any given year.
- The average age of onset of panic disorder is 25 years of age. However it can develop at any age.
- Women are more likely to have panic disorder than men.
- Individuals with a family history of anxiety or depression are at greater risk for developing panic disorder.
- Between 50-60% of individuals with panic disorder also suffer from depression.

Panic Disorder



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What is Panic Disorder?

A panic disorder is an anxiety disorder characterized by frequent, recurring panic attacks. A panic attack is the sudden, unexpected onset of intense fear and discomfort. Panic disorder affects 3.5% of the population.

Causes of Panic Disorders

There are two main theories that cause panic disorders:

1) Biological theories are based on the idea that the brain has a natural alarm system that somehow malfunctions because of genetic or environmental circumstances, causing panic.

2) Behavioral theories focus on the nature of panic attacks as an irrational response to a non-threatening stimulus. Once these theories are identified and analyzed rationally, you can learn to respond normally to the situation or trigger that causes these attacks.

Symptoms

The defining characteristic of a panic disorder is a panic attack. A person's first attack may be provoked by a current situation, but in panic disorder, subsequent attacks occur unexpectedly and without provocation. Common symptoms that are associated with a panic attack are:

- **Abdominal distress (diarrhea, nausea)**
- **Chest pain or discomfort**
- **Chills or hot flashes**
- **Fear of dying**
- **Fear of losing control or "going crazy"**
- **Feeling faint, dizzy, or lightheaded**
- **Feeling of choking**
- **Feeling of unreality or of being detached from oneself**
- **Numbness or tingling sensation**
- **Palpitations, pounding heart, racing heartbeat**
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Sweating**

To be considered a panic attack, four or more of these symptoms must occur abruptly and reach their peak intensity within ten minutes.

Another characteristic of panic disorder is **Agoraphobia**. Agoraphobia is the anxiety about or avoidance of specific places or situations. People may become very inhibited and afraid of most situations. Some of those situations include:

- Being in public places
- Driving in traffic, through tunnels, or on bridges
- Eating in public places
- Waiting in line

Some people with agoraphobia never leave their apartment or house. Others stop going out alone and only go out with people they trust.

