

Anxiety and Panic Attack

A panic attack occurs when someone suddenly feels very scared or anxious for a short amount of time. This can feel very intense. It can last anywhere between five minutes to an hour.

Experts are not sure what exactly causes panic attacks, but they can happen when someone is feeling very stressed out, depressed, or senses some danger. They can also happen randomly.

When panic attacks occur often, it is called a panic disorder. It can be scary to have a panic attack, but having one attack does not mean that you have panic disorder.



What to Expect

Anxiety is the feeling of fear or worry. It can be a normal reaction to stressful or dangerous situations. However, it gets in the way of your daily life when it is constant, not appropriate for the situation, or hard to control. Anxiety can be triggered by certain situations, places, or something stressful in your life or can happen randomly. Knowing what triggers your anxiety may help you manage it better.

People with anxiety also may experience:

- Feeling restless or on edge
- Fatigue and difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Muscle tension

Some people with anxiety experience **panic attacks**. These come on suddenly without a clear cause and last for 5-10 minutes to an hour. Symptoms of a panic attack can include:

- Sudden intense fear and feeling of doom.
- Feeling detached from your body, out of control, or like you are dying.
- Shortness of breath, chest discomfort, fast heartbeat, feeling faint or dizzy.
- Sweating, shaking, or feeling unsteady.

Recommended Follow-Up

Follow up in ___ days.

Name of Provider

Reason

Date/Time

Location

Contact Info



When to Get Help

Go to a walk-in clinic, see your healthcare provider, counsellor or call 811 if:

- Your anxiety is getting worse, or it is difficult to manage.
- You are having panic attacks more often or have difficulty coping with them.

Use the following 24/7 Resources:

- Canada's Crisis hotline (call or text): 9-8-8.
- 24/7 Talk Suicide Canada line: 1-833-456-4566.

Go to the nearest Emergency Department, Urgent Care Centre or call 911 if:

- You feel you are going to harm yourself or someone else.
- You are having **new or different symptoms** from your usual panic attack such as: pain or pressure in your chest, back, neck, jaw, shoulders, or arms; shortness of breath; fast heartbeat; fainting.

To Learn More:

- Ask Your health care provider or counsellor.
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca



How to Care for Yourself at Home

There are things you can do every day to try and reduce your anxiety:

- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Walk, jog, or do something active for at least 20 minutes per day.
- Try deep breathing, muscle relaxation exercises, meditation, yoga, and mindfulness.
- Have a regular sleep schedule. Aim for 6-8 hours of sleep per night.
- Reduce the amount of caffeine, alcohol, or nicotine (smoking or vaping) you use. Avoid street drugs.

Anxiety and Panic Attack Discharge Instructions - continued

If you experience a panic attack, try to develop a 'toolbox' of strategies to help you feel better:

- Calming breathing
- Muscle relaxation
- Reading coping cards or calming mantras
- Grounding techniques

Remember, panic attacks can feel very scary, but you are not in danger. These techniques can help you cope with a panic attack but may not stop it completely.

To help you with these symptoms long term, you can see a counsellor who uses cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), do a home program or try some strategies using the MindShift™ CBT app.



Medication

- Your doctor may have given you a small prescription for medication to use when you are having a panic attack. Only take these as prescribed.

Reproduced with permission from Vancouver Coastal Health and Providence Health Care. Find this information sheet on the ECBC website:

https://emergencycarebc.ca/clinical_resource/patient-information-sheet/panic-attack-2/

Additional Information

- **Anxiety Canada:**
<https://www.anxietycanada.com>
- **Improving sleep:**
<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/getting-a-good-nights-sleep/>
- **Online anxiety self-management program:**
<https://maps.anxietycanada.com/courses/anxiety-plan-for-adults/>
- **MindShift CBT app:**
<https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/>
- **Stress management and relaxation techniques:**
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/stress-management-relaxing-your-mind-and-body>
- **Discharge Instructions – Panic Attack Care from Sunnybrook Hospital in Ontario, Canada**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zy1oHHRiVSM>

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