

# What is a PANIC ATTACK?



A panic attack is an intense wave of fear characterised by its unexpectedness and debilitating, immobilising intensity. A panic attack may be a one-time occurrence, although many people experience repeat episodes.

Most of the symptoms of a panic attack are physical, and many times these symptoms are so severe that you may think you're having a heart attack. Panic attacks should also not be confused with anxiety attacks.

**The following indicates some of the differences between a panic attack and an anxiety attack:**

## PANIC ATTACK

**Symptoms are more intense and can cause a major disruption in your day.**

**Characterised by 4 or more of the following symptoms:**

- Heart palpitations, pounding heart
- Excessive sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath, difficulty breathing
- Feeling of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded or faint
- Feeling of unreality or being detached from oneself
- Fear of losing control or going crazy
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- Numbness or tingling sensations
- Chills or hot flashes

## ANXIETY ATTACK

**Anxiety intensifies over a period of time.**

**Stress may reach a level that is overwhelming and feel like an "attack".**

**Symptoms of anxiety may include:**

- Muscle tension
- Disturbed sleep
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Increased heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness

**Symptoms may be persisting and very long-lasting**



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## PANIC ATTACK

- Sharp, stabbing pain in middle of chest
- Sudden onset
- Pain gets better over time
- Symptoms only last 20-30 minutes
- Racing heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Shakiness
- Tingling in the hands

## HEART ATTACK

- Squeezing pain and pressure in chest
- Sudden onset or during physical exertion
- Pain radiates
- Pain gets worse over time
- Longer lasting symptoms
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Nausea and vomiting

# COMPLICATIONS OF PANIC ATTACKS

**Left untreated, panic attacks can affect almost every area of your life. You may be so afraid of having more panic attacks that you live in a constant state of fear, ruining your quality of life. Complications that panic attacks may cause or be linked to include:**

- Development of specific phobias, such as fear of driving or leaving your home
- Frequent medical care for health concerns and other medical conditions
- Avoidance of social situations
- Problems at work or school
- Depression, anxiety disorders and other psychiatric disorders
- Increased risk of suicide or suicidal thoughts
- Alcohol or other substance misuse
- Financial problems

### HELP IS AVAILABLE

If you have panic attack symptoms, seek help as soon as possible. Panic attacks, while intensely uncomfortable, are not dangerous. But panic attacks are hard to manage on your own, and they may get worse without treatment.

**YOU ARE WELCOME TO CONTACT PLATINUM HEALTH'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES (014 590 1700 OR 080 000 6942) TO BOOK AN APPOINTMENT OR ALTERNATIVELY CONTACT PLATINUM HEALTH'S EAP COUNSELLORS (010 133 0525) WHO ARE AVAILABLE 24 HOURS PER DAY, 7 DAYS PER WEEK TO OFFER COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT.**