



# MANAGING A PANIC ATTACK

## WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?

Panic attacks are sudden onset moments of fear and/or discomfort that escalate and reach their peak within minutes. They are often differentiated from other anxiety symptoms by the high intensity and short duration of the attack.

These attacks can happen in calm or anxious states and have specific symptoms to identify; however, these symptoms are very similar to other anxiety symptoms and those of a heart attack.

Panic attacks are usually quick and pass in a short amount of time, typically a few minutes. Some heart attacks are intense and quick, but most start slowly with mild discomfort and do not go away without being treated by a medical professional.



*More than 1 in 5 people experience a panic attack during their lifetime. Panic attacks can be extremely uncomfortable and frightening. However, panic attacks pass and can be managed.*

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING A PANIC ATTACK

1. Reference the symptom and signs comparison to determine that you are experiencing a panic attack and reassure yourself that it will pass.
2. Practice breathing techniques such as breathing in through your nose for 5 seconds and out through your mouth for 5 seconds.
3. Focus on your breathing by closing your eyes. Try to relax your body while you tune in to your 5 senses to help ground you.
4. Once the attack is over and you feel better, consult with a healthcare professional to help prevent and manage future attacks.

## ! SIGNS & SYMPTOMS !



### PANIC ATTACK

*Accelerated Heart Rate  
Pounding Heart  
Heart Palpitations  
Sweating  
Shaking  
Dizziness  
Shortness of Breath  
Smothering Sensations  
Feelings of Choking  
Chest Pain  
Nausea  
Chills  
Hot Flashes  
Numbness  
Tingling Sensation  
Fear of Losing Control  
Fear of Dying*

VS.

### HEART ATTACK



*Sudden Cardiac Arrest  
Chest Pain Lasting Longer Than a Few Minutes  
Shortness of Breath  
Cold Sweats  
Nausea  
Heart Burn  
Dizziness  
Pain or Discomfort in Other Parts of the Body:  
One or both arms  
Neck  
Back  
Jaw  
Stomach*

## ACTION STEPS TO SUPPORT SOMEONE EXPERIENCING A PANIC ATTACK

1. Determine if it is a panic attack or heart attack by evaluating the warning signs being displayed. Ask if they've experienced these symptoms in the past.
2. If the person says they are having a panic attack, ask if they'd like your help and then ask, "how can I best support you?"
3. Remain calm and reassure them of your support. Stay with them until the panic passes if possible.
4. Calmly acknowledge their fear and reassure them that panic attack symptoms will pass. Provide space so they do not feel physically crowded.
5. Don't call attention to their breathing, instead model a steady breathing rate, or have them count to 10 slowly with you.
6. When the panic attack is over, encourage self-care and for the person to seek professional support to help them safely manage, and treat future panic attacks.

**If you or the person you are helping is experiencing a heart attack, can't determine if it is a heart attack, or if immediate help is needed, call 911 immediately. If the person loses consciousness, follow first aid protocol.**