

Living with Attacks

If you have an attack:

- **Remember you aren't in danger:** Although your experience is frightening, it is not harmful
- **Don't try to fight** off the attack
- **Pay attention** to what is *actually* going on- "I'm feeling out of breath." Observe the sensations. Notice how they change from moment to moment and fade within a few minutes.
- **Try not to increase your fright:** Don't start thinking about "what ifs".
- **Give yourself a simple task:** try counting backwards from 100 by 3's, for example. This will focus your attention on something else until the attack stops.

Resources

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (camh.net)

Canadian Mental Health Association (cmha.ca)

Health and Counselling Services (carleton.ca/health)

CU Healthy

HCS wants to CU Healthy! The Health Promotion Team at HCS tries to achieve this through our:

- Resource Centre
- Student Peer Interns Health Promotion Advisory Committee
- Website (carleton.ca/health)
- Facebook page
- Newsletters, class presentations, workshops and more . . .

The Health Promotion Team promotes healthy lifestyles and wellness and can provide you with information about stress, colds, nutrition, sexuality, alcohol, etc. Contact the Resource Centre for more information at 613-520-2600 ext. 6544 or email us at carletonwellness@gmail.com



2600 CTTC Building
613-520-6674
carleton.ca/health

PANIC ATTACKS



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What is a panic attack?

Have you ever had periods of **sudden, unexpected terror**?

Have you had a **pounding heart, breathlessness, sweating and shaking**?

Have you rushed to your health care provider or an emergency room with **symptoms that felt like a heart attack**-but tests showed your heart was fine?

Are you afraid you'll be overwhelmed by one of these attacks where it would be embarrassing, or where you couldn't get away?

If you've had these experiences, you may suffer from *panic attacks*.

A panic attack is a flood of physical and emotional sensations of fright, without an apparent cause. Panic attacks are extremely unpleasant and can lead to other problems if not treated.

Panic attacks aren't rare. An estimated 35-40% of the population has at least 1 panic attack a year. The worst thing about panic attacks is having panic attacks. The second worst thing is that many people never get help because they are embarrassed, or because their symptoms are not identified as panic attacks.

If you have panic attacks....

You aren't dying-even though you might feel you are

You aren't making them up-panic attacks are real. They aren't "all in your head"

You can get relief from them-Panic attacks are treatable

Symptoms

Panic attack signs and symptoms can include:

- Pounding heart
- A choking feeling
- Nausea
- Numbness in parts of the body
- Fear of losing control
- Other acute physical or emotional distress

The sensations of having a panic attack are real. They may be so intense they feel like a heart attack or other life-threatening emergency.

In people with panic attacks, the body reacts to nonthreatening situations as if they were threatening. This causes distress, resulting from the body's mistaken response.

Causes

Many factors can cause a panic attack:

- **Genetics:** People whose relatives have suffered panic attacks are more likely to have panic attacks.
- **Stress:** People who've recently suffered a major change or loss (failure in school, loss of a job or relationship, serious illness or an accident) are more likely to have panic attacks. So are people who've been under constant stress for some time.
- **Drug Use:** The use of some substances is associated with panic attacks. Some people have panic attacks after using caffeine, nicotine or marijuana. Going suddenly from many cups of coffee a day to none can also have the same effect. A few medications can also trigger panic attacks.



Treatment

The best long-term relief will come with a well-planned combination of strategies. An effective treatment plan requires good understanding of panic attacks, so it's important to find a health care provider who is knowledgeable about panic attack treatments.

When you see a health care provider, they may get you to consider these things to give you relief:

- **Medicines:** These can alleviate panic attacks fairly quickly. Depending on the severity of your attacks, one or more of these medicines may be right for you.
- **Talk Therapy:** This can help you to reduce or eliminate panic attacks. Therapy can also help you to change your reaction to the attacks, so they become less severe
- **Make a plan to cut down** on caffeine and alcohol, or stop the use of marijuana
- **Develop a plan to reduce stress** in your life. If you can't avoid stress, learn ways to help you cope with tension and anxiety

* The CU Healthy Program gratefully acknowledges ETR Associates as a resource for the information in this brochure