

## Finding Help

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides this online resource for locating mental health treatment facilities and programs. The Mental Health Treatment Locator section of the Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator lists facilities providing mental health services to persons with mental illness. Find a facility in your state at <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>.

**For information on medications** for panic disorder, contact:  
Medline Plus (National Library of Medicine) at  
<http://medlineplus.gov>  
En Español: <http://medlineplus.gov/spanish>

**For more information on Panic Disorder** and other mental illnesses, please contact any of the following:  
NAMI Flagstaff at [www.namiflagstaff.org](http://www.namiflagstaff.org)  
NAMI Arizona at [www.namiarizona.org](http://www.namiarizona.org)  
NAMI National at [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)  
NIMH at [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

Scan image to go directly to  
NAMI Flagstaff website



**Please note:** Neither NIMH or NAMI provide specific medical advice or treatment recommendations or referrals.

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## PANIC DISORDER When Fear Overwhelms

Do you sometimes have sudden attacks of anxiety and overwhelming fear that last for several minutes? Maybe your heart pounds, you sweat, and you feel like you can't breathe or think. Do these attacks occur at unpredictable times with no obvious trigger? If so, you may have a type of anxiety disorder called panic disorder. Left untreated, panic disorder can lower your quality of life because it may lead to other fears, problems at work or school, and social isolation.

### What is Panic Disorder?

Panic attacks are characterized by a fear of disaster or of losing control even when there is no real danger. A person may also have a strong physical reaction during a panic attack. It may feel like having a heart attack. Panic attacks can occur at any time, and many people with panic disorder worry about and dread the possibility of having another attack.

A person with panic disorder may become discouraged and feel ashamed because he or she cannot carry out normal routines like going to school or work, going to the grocery store, or driving. Panic disorder often begins in the late teens or early adulthood. More women than men have panic disorder. But not everyone who experiences panic attacks will develop panic disorder.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sudden and repeated panic attacks of overwhelming anxiety and fear.
- A feeling of being out of control, or a fear of death or impending doom during a panic attack
- Physical symptoms such as a pounding or racing heart, sweating, chills, trembling, breathing problems, weakness or dizziness, tingly or numb hands, chest pain, stomach pain and nausea.
- An intense worry about when the next panic attack will happen.
- A fear or avoidance of places where panic attacks have occurred in the past.

## How is panic disorder treated?

First, talk to your doctor about your symptoms. Your doctor should do an exam and ask you about your health history to make sure that an unrelated physical problem is not causing your symptoms. Panic disorder is generally treated with psychotherapy, medication, or both. Talk with your doctor about the best treatment for you.

### Psychotherapy

A type of psychotherapy called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is especially useful as a first-line treatment for panic disorder. CBT teaches you different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to the feelings that come on with a panic attack. The attacks can begin to disappear once you learn to react differently to the physical sensations of anxiety and fear that occur during panic attacks.

**Medication.** SSRIs and SNRIs are commonly used to treat depression, but they are also helpful for the symptoms of panic disorder. They may take several weeks to start working. These medications may also cause side-effects, such as headaches, nausea, or difficulty sleeping. These side effects are usually not severe for most people, especially if the dose starts off low and is increased slowly over time. Talk to your doctor about any side effects that you have.

Another type of medication called beta-blockers can help control some of the physical symptoms of panic disorder, such as rapid heart rate. Although doctors do not commonly prescribe beta-blockers for panic disorder, they may be helpful in certain situations that precede a panic attack.

Benzodiazepines, which are sedative medications, are powerfully effective in rapidly decreasing panic attack symptoms, but they can cause tolerance and dependence if you use them continuously. Therefore, your doctor will only prescribe them for brief periods of time if you need them.

Don't give up on treatment too quickly. Both psychotherapy and medication can take some time to work. A healthy lifestyle can also help combat panic disorder. Make sure to get enough sleep and exercise, eat a healthy diet, and turn to family and friends who you trust for support.

### Talk to your doctor

Asking questions and providing information to your doctor or health care provider can improve your care. Be honest, talk about your fears and symptoms. Tell your doctor about any side effects you're having and ask what other treatments are available.