

## Panic Attacks

A panic attack is a sudden onset of intense fear that triggers serious physical reactions, such as a racing heartbeat or shortness of breath, when there is no real danger or apparent cause. When panic attacks occur, the individual feels like they are losing control, having a heart attack or dying. Panic attacks usually develop without warning and can last a few minutes to several hours.



## Signs & Symptoms

Panic attacks can strike at any time — while driving a car, at the mall, sound asleep or in the middle of a meeting. An individual may experience occasional panic attacks or frequent panic attacks. Each person can experience a panic attack differently, but symptoms usually peak within minutes. Symptoms of a panic attack can include:

- Intense fear or feelings of impending doom
- Racing heartbeat
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Shortness of breath
- Feelings of tightness in the throat or chest
- Sweating, chills, or hot flashes
- Feeling detached from reality

## Causes & Risk Factors

There is no exact known cause of panic attacks, but factors such as genetics, experiencing major stress, having a temperament that is more prone to stress or negative emotions, Risk factors that can increase a person's chance for having a panic attack can include:

- Family history of panic attacks or panic disorder
- Traumatic events or increase in stress
- Major life changes such as divorce
- Smoking or excessive caffeine intake

## Diagnosis & Treatment

A primary care physician can diagnose an individual if they are experiencing panic attacks by administering a physical exam, a physiological exam, and blood tests to check the thyroid or other tests like an electrocardiogram (ECG) to rule out any thyroid or heart conditions. Treatment for panic attacks commonly consist of a combination of psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Source – Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/panic-attacks/symptoms-causes/syc-20376021>