



GLASGOW ANXIETY & DEPRESSION
COUNSELLING SERVICE

PANIC ATTACKS

What are Panic Attacks?

We all experience anxious periods now and again. Like Everyday Anxiety Information Sheet highlighted, some anxiety, worry and/or nervousness is 'normal' and can even act as a motivator sometimes (e.g. deadlines at work).

However, when someone regularly has sudden attacks of panic or fear, they may be experiencing Panic Attacks or have Panic Disorder. For someone having Panic Attacks, these feelings of anxiety, panic and heightened stress occur frequently and can happen at any time, often out-of-the blue and for no apparent reason.

Having a Panic Attack can be a very overwhelming, frightening and distressing experience. It occurs when your body has a rush of intense mental and physical symptoms that often come on very quickly and for no apparent reason or trigger. Panic Attacks are a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of your body's normal response to danger, stress or excitement.

Over time, some people become scared of going out alone or to public places because they're worried or frightened about having another panic attack. If this fear becomes very intense, it may be called agoraphobia.

Panic Attacks can happen several times a day or once a week for some. Everyone is different. They can happen at night or during the day and often arise out of nowhere (although not always). While there may be some features of Panic Attacks that people share, it's important to remember that everyone is different and how we experience panic can differ from person-to-person too.

Most Panic Attacks last between 5 and 20 minutes and symptoms often peak at the 10-minute mark. Some might feel they are having a Panic Attack over a long period of time. This might be panic merging into another form of anxiety

(e.g. Generalised Anxiety) or it might be two Panic Attacks merging into each other, consecutively, over a short space of time.

You might also notice certain triggers that bring on your Panic Attacks. There are not always triggers. However, some triggers to look out for include: certain people, situations, places, events, feelings, thoughts or physical sensations that appear to be present before a Panic Attack happens.

Signs and Symptoms of Panic Attacks

Some of the signs and symptoms to look out for include:

- Overwhelming sense of fear and anxiety, usually only for a few minutes)
- Periods of intense fear or anxiety
- A fast/racing heartbeat
- Choking/suffocating sensation
- Churning stomach
- Feeling like you're not connected to your body or disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings
- Pain in your chest or abdomen
- Feeling faint, dizzy, weak or that your legs are turning to jelly
- Feeling very hot or very cold
- Feeling afraid that you're going to faint, lose control, have a heart attack or even die
- Feeling sick/nausea
- Sense of intense dread
- Ringing in your ears
- Hot flushes and/or chills
- A need to go to the toilet
- Trembling or shaking
- Numbness of pins and needles
- Changing your behaviour so you can avoid certain situations have caused you anxiety or panic in the past
- An urge to escape or flee the place where the panic attack began
- Fear of future periods of panic/panic attacks

Remember, we are all different and some of us will notice the physical symptoms more while others might be more bothered by the emotional or cognitive effects of Panic attacks.

Whatever your symptoms might be, anxiety over a long period of time can lead to many other problems and have a significant impact on our physical and mental health. Take action before it's too late and you become ill with anxiety. If you recognise elements of these signs and symptoms in yourself, it might be time to talk to someone about it. We are here to support you.