



Panic Attacks: A Guide for Students

Panic Attacks

Anxiety is a response to a sense of danger such as ‘something bad about to happen’ or ‘I don’t know what to expect and am sure I won’t be able to cope’. The reason why we are anxious can therefore be hard to find sometimes. Everybody feels anxious from time to time. A little bit of anxiety is normal. It can help us to stay safe and to focus and get things done. But feeling anxious a lot can be a bad thing and we can also get used to feeling anxious, so it can become a way of being.

Panic attacks can happen if we feel really anxious and haven’t yet been helped to learn ways to calm ourselves. Panic attacks can be frightening but we can learn to control them. They can last from a few seconds to 10 minutes. A panic attack cannot harm you. Stay calm and breathe and it **WILL** pass.

How will I know if I am having a Panic Attack?

We all have our own way of responding when anxious. However, when having a panic attack our thoughts, feelings and actions become more intense.

THOUGHTS

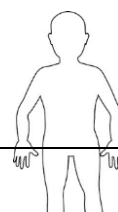
You may think:

- “I don’t want to go anywhere”
- “I don’t want to see those people”
- “Am I doing this right?”
- “I think I’m dying”,
- “Everyone will think I’m stupid”

BODY FEELINGS

You may:

- Find it hard to breathe
- Have chest or stomach pains
- Have tingling in your hands or feet
- Find your heart beating very quickly
- Have really tense muscles
- Start to sweat or tremble





- Feel like you are choking
- Have a skin rash
- Have a headache
- Feel dizzy
- Feel sick
- Have diarrhoea

ACTIONS

You may:

- Want to hide
- Not know what to do
- Not be able to speak
- Stay rigid
- Not know what to say
- Want to run away
- Want to push people away



How to Manage a Panic Attack

Things you can do

- Practice things to help you relax. Find what works well for you.
- Practice taking deep breaths.
- Try to figure out what causes you to feel anxious. Pay attention to what you are thinking when you begin to feel anxious.
- Talk to someone about your feelings.
- Let others know what helps you during a panic attack e.g. “a hand on my shoulder lets me know that there are people with me” or “I do not like if someone touches me”.

During a panic attack

- Don't run away.
- Ask or signal for help.
- Try using a paper bag to breathe into - this will help you to breathe.



- Tell yourself what is happening. You can say “I am having a panic attack, it will pass”.
- Say things that will help you to be calm – “This will pass”; “I will be ok”.
- Take deep breaths. Do this until you calm down.
- Try to count backwards or sing a song in your head.
- Try to move around. Walking or stretching may help.
- Think of a place or a thing that makes you feel happy or safe.

Remember this takes practice. Stick with it. Take the time to practice when you are not feeling anxious.

You are not alone. Talking with someone you trust will help. If you have panic attacks, talk to an adult you trust and/or visit your doctor.

For more information on how to seek help see

[Mental health support services for young people - HSE.ie](https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/mental_health/mental_health_support_services_for_young_people.htm)