

**Do you have sudden bursts of fear for no reason?**

A REAL ILLNESS

Panic Disorder



# Does This Sound Like You?

Do you have sudden bursts of fear for no reason?

Please put a check in the box next to any problems you have during these sudden bursts of fear.

- I have chest pains or a racing heart.
- I have a hard time breathing or a choking feeling.
- I feel dizzy, or I sweat a lot.
- I have stomach problems or feel like I need to throw up.
- I shake, tremble, or tingle.
- I feel out of control.
- I feel unreal.
- I am afraid I am dying or going crazy.

If you put a check in the box next to some of these problems, you may have **Panic Disorder.**

# Panic disorder is a **real** illness that needs to be treated.

It's not your fault if you have this illness,  
and you don't have to suffer.

Read this booklet and learn how to get help.  
You **can** feel better and get your life back!

# 1. What is panic disorder?

Panic disorder is a real illness. It can be treated with medicine or therapy.

If you have panic disorder, you feel suddenly terrified for no reason. These frequent bursts of terror are called panic attacks. During a panic attack, you also have scary physical feelings like a fast heartbeat, trouble breathing, or dizziness.

Panic attacks can happen at any time and any place without warning. They often happen in grocery stores, malls, crowds, or while traveling.

You may live in constant fear of another attack and may stay away from places where you have had an attack. For some people, fear takes over their lives and they are unable to leave their homes.

Panic attacks don't last long, but they are so scary they feel like they go on forever.

## 2. When does panic disorder start and how long does it last?

It usually starts when people are young adults, around 18 to 24 years old. Sometimes it starts when a person is already under a lot of stress, for example after the death of a loved one or after having a baby.

Anyone can have panic disorder, but more women than men have the illness. It sometimes runs in families.

Panic disorder can last for a few months or for many years.

## 3. Am I the only person with this illness?

No. You are not alone. In any year, 2.4 million Americans have panic disorder.

## 4. What can I do to help myself?

- **Talk to your doctor about your fear and panic attacks.**

Tell your doctor if the panic attacks keep you from doing everyday things and living your life. You may want to show your doctor this booklet. It can help you explain how you feel. Ask your doctor for a checkup to make sure you don't have some other illness.

- **Ask your doctor if he or she has helped other people with panic disorder.** Special training helps doctors treat people with panic disorder. If your doctor doesn't have special training, ask for the name of a doctor or counselor who does.

- **Get more information.** Call 1-88-88-ANXIETY to have free information mailed to you.

You **can**  
feel  
better.

# 5. What can a doctor or counselor do to help me?

- The doctor may give you medicine. Medicine usually helps people with panic disorder feel better after a few weeks.
- Talking to a specially trained doctor or counselor helps many people with panic disorder. This is called “therapy.” Therapy will teach you ways to feel less afraid and anxious.



# Here is one person's story:

“One day, without any warning or reason, I felt terrified. I was so afraid, I thought I was going to die. My heart was pounding and my head was spinning. I would get these feelings every couple of weeks. I thought I was losing my mind.



“The more attacks I had, the more afraid I got. I was always living in fear. I didn't know when I might have another attack. I became so afraid that I didn't want to leave my house or other safe places.



“My friend saw how afraid I was and told me to call my doctor for help. My doctor told me I have panic disorder. My doctor gave me medicine that helps me feel less afraid. I've also been working with a counselor learning ways to cope with my fear. I had to work hard, but after a few months of medicine and therapy, I'm starting to feel like myself again.”

# Remember – you can get help now:

- Talk to your doctor about your fear and panic attacks.
- Call 1-88-88-ANXIETY (1-888-826-9438). It is a free call. You will get free information about panic disorder mailed to you.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is part of the Federal government. NIMH conducts medical research to find new and better ways to prevent and treat mental illnesses. NIMH also provides free information about mental illnesses.

To get free information about other mental illnesses, write to NIMH at:

National Institute of Mental Health  
6001 Executive Boulevard  
Room 8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

You can also find free NIMH information online at:  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>



This is the electronic version of a National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) publication, available from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/index.cfm>. To order a print copy, call the NIMH Information Center at 301-443-4513 or 1-866-615-6464 (toll-free). Visit the NIMH Web site (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>) for information that supplements this publication.

To learn more about NIMH programs and publications, contact the following:

Web address:

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

E-mail:

[nimhinfo@nih.gov](mailto:nimhinfo@nih.gov)

Phone numbers:

301-443-4513 (local)

1-866-615-6464 (toll-free)

301-443-8431 (TTY)

1-866-415-8051 (TTY toll-free)

Fax numbers:

301-443-4279

301-443-5158 (FAX 4U)

Street address:

National Institute of Mental Health  
Office of Communications  
Room 8184, MSC 9663  
6001 Executive Boulevard  
Bethesda, Maryland 20892-9663 USA

---

This information is in the public domain and can be copied or reproduced without permission from NIMH. To reference this material, we suggest the following format:

National Institute of Mental Health. Title. Bethesda (MD): National Institute of Mental Health, National Institutes of Health, US Department of Health and Human Services; Year of Publication/Printing [Date of Update/Revision; Date of Citation]. Extent. (NIH Publication No XXX XXXX). Availability.

A specific example is:

National Institute of Mental Health. Childhood-Onset Schizophrenia: An Update from the National Institute of Mental Health. Bethesda (MD): National Institute of Mental Health, National Institutes of Health, US Department of Health and Human Services; 2003 [cited 2004 February 24]. (NIH Publication Number: NIH 5124). 4 pages. Available from: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/schizkids.cfm>