

Calm the storm within

“You are not your panic, you are your courage.”

If you are reading this, maybe you have felt it, that sudden, overwhelming wave of fear, chest pounding, breath shortening, the fear that something terrible is about to happen.

You are not alone. And you are not “crazy” or “weak” for feeling this way.

This toolkit is your safe companion, designed to help you understand, manage, and heal from panic attacks in a way that is simple, kind, and science-backed..

What is Panic Disorder?

Panic disorder is a mental health condition where a person has repeated panic attacks and lives in fear of having more.

Even when there's no real danger, the body reacts like there is - suddenly and intensely.

It often leads to avoiding places or situations where a panic attack might happen, which can limit daily life.

A panic attack is a sudden wave of intense fear or discomfort that comes out of nowhere, often with physical symptoms like a racing heart, shortness of breath, or feeling like you're losing control.



Common symptoms include

- Racing heartbeat
- Sweating or trembling
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Nausea or stomach upset
- Fear of losing control or dying
- Feeling detached from reality

Panic attacks themselves are not dangerous, but the fear of them can take over daily life.

Self-check: could this be Panic Disorder?

- ☐ I have had two or more unexpected panic attacks.
- ☐ I constantly worry about when the next attack might happen.
- ☐ I avoid places or activities "just in case" I have a panic attack.
- ☐ My panic attacks are interfering with my work, social life, or daily activities.

If you checked 2 or more, this toolkit is definitely for you.
(And reaching out to a mental health professional would be a great next step.)



Common symptoms include

- Your brain's amygdala triggers a false alarm ("danger!") even when you are safe.
- Your body instantly shifts into fight, flight, or freeze mode.
- Adrenaline floods your system, causing intense physical symptoms.

Panic attacks are **natural survival mechanisms**. They are just misfiring in modern life. It is not your fault, and it can be managed.

How Panic Disorder affects daily Life

Thoughts:

- "What if I lose control in public?"
- "What if no one helps me?"
- "What if I have a heart attack?"

Behavior:

- Avoiding malls, public transport, driving, social gatherings
- Staying close to "safe zones" (home, car)
- Carrying water bottles, snacks, or medication "just in case"
- Isolation "staying home to feel safe"
- Seeking reassurance constantly
- Hypervigilant behaviour

Relationships:

- Cancelling plans often
- Relying heavily on a "safe person" (partner, parent)
- Feeling misunderstood or isolated
- Constant reassurance seeking
- Constant Anxiety affecting relationships

Physical Health:

- Constant tension
- Sleep disturbances
- Exhaustion from being in "high alert" mode Chronic Fatigue
- Loss of Appetite/ Loss of weight'



Immediate tools for calming a Panic Attack

When panic strikes, remember: You are not in danger. You are in discomfort and discomfort passes.

1. Name It to Tame It

Say to yourself: ***"This is a panic attack. It will pass. I am safe."***

2. Focus on Your Breath

- Inhale slowly through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds
(Repeat until you feel calmer.).

3. Ground Yourself with 5-4-3-2-1

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

4. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Techniques (PMR)

Tighten and release different muscle groups in your body.

5. Seek Immediate Psychiatric Help

In severe cases, Panic attack requires medication to calm down the mind and relax the body.



Long-Term strategies for managing Panic

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Gold-standard therapy for panic disorder.
- Panic-Focused Exposure Therapy: Gradual exposure to feared sensations.
- Breathing Exercises: Practice daily, not just during panic.
- Mindfulness Meditation: Train your brain to observe, not react.
- Medication: SSRIs or anti-anxiety meds (under professional care).
- Lifestyle Tweaks:
 - Limit caffeine and alcohol
 - Regular physical activity
 - Healthy sleep habits

Myth Busters

Myth

"I'm going to die from a panic attack."

"Avoiding triggers will solve the problem."

"I must be weak to have panic attacks."

"Medication is the only answer."

Truth

Panic attacks feel intense but are not deadly.

Avoidance fuels the fear cycle.

Panic is a brain misfire, not a character flaw

Therapy and coping skills are highly effective too.

Language Script

- Instead of: "I cannot survive this feeling."

Try: "This is uncomfortable, not dangerous. I can ride it out."

- Instead of: "What if I faint?"

Try: "Even if I feel dizzy, I am not going to faint."

Tracking and celebrating wins

Use a Panic Episode Tracker:

Date:

Trigger

Intensity (Scale 1-10)

Coping tool used

Recovery time

Celebrate wins like _____

- Experiencing a panic attack and not avoiding the situation
- Going somewhere new even if anxious
- Using breathing tools before full-blown panic

Small victories build confidence!

When to seek Help _____

- Panic attacks happen frequently and unexpectedly.
- You avoid more and more activities.
- You feel constantly on edge.
- You have suicidal thoughts.

Seeking therapy is not giving up, it is gearing up for recovery.

