

What exactly is a “Panic Attack”

“A panic attack is an intense and sudden feeling of fear, terror, or discomfort accompanied by several other mental and physical symptoms. The symptoms of panic attacks are often so extreme that they cause severe disruption”.



According to the DSM-5, a panic attack is characterized by four or more of the following symptoms:

Mental Manifestations:

- Feelings of unreality (derealization)
- Feeling detached from oneself (depersonalization)
- Fear of losing control or going crazy
- Fear of dying

Physical Manifestations:

- Heart palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate
- Excessive sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath, difficulty breathing
- Feeling of choking
- Chest pain
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded, or faint
- Numbness or tingling sensations (paresthesias)
- Chills
- Hot flashes

Panic attacks usually occur out of the blue without an obvious, immediate trigger. In some cases, they are "expected" because the fear is caused by a known stressor, such as a phobia.

Panic attack symptoms peak within 10 minutes and then subside. However, some attacks may last longer or may occur in succession, making it difficult to determine when one attack ends and another begins. Following an attack, it is not unusual to feel stressed, worried, out-of-sorts, or on edge for the remainder of the day.

Now that you know what they are and what they look like; how to do stop them?

Grounding is an effective way to calm anxiety during a panic attack. In this process, you identify objects around you to help your brain recognize where you are. This creates a sense of comfort because you know where you are and you feel more in control of the situation. Combine this with slow-deep breathing exercises (in through your nose for 5 seconds, out through your lips for 5 seconds), and you should be feeling better in no time. Here are some grounding techniques that could be helpful during an anxiety/panic attack.

The 54321 Ground Method for mitigating the attack.

The most common grounding technique for anxiety attacks is the 54321 method. In this, you identify...

- 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

Taste is sometimes hard to identify, so you could substitute that by thinking of your favorite thing to taste. Some versions of the 54321 grounding method say to name one thing you like about yourself. Regardless of how you approach this, the goal is to identify elements in the world around you. As your mind begins to focus on these things, it will be less focused on the sudden rush of anxiety. This will help slow your heart rate, control your breathing, and make you feel better overall.

Talk Yourself through the Attack

Another form of grounding involves self-therapy. When you feel the anxiety attack coming on, talk to yourself (either out loud or in your head). Tell yourself that you are having an anxiety attack and that it is going to be OK. You have gone through this before, and you can get through it again. You are strong enough to handle your emotions, and the anxiety attack will not last long. Keep repeating these positive statements until you feel yourself calming down.

Play a Game with Yourself

You could get your mind off the anxiety attack by playing a quick game. Ask yourself a question that has several answers:

- Name as many states as you can
- Name as many dog breeds as you can
- Name as many cities as you can
- Recite the alphabet backwards
- Practice simple times tables

You may respond better to some questions than others, but the idea is to make yourself think about something other than anxiety. All grounding methods for anxiety attacks are mind over matter, but they do work. Give it a go next you are having a panic attack, or feel anxiety coming over you.

How can I help prevent attacks from developing?

Your healthcare provider can help you identify triggers that bring on panic attacks. During psychotherapy, you learn strategies to manage triggering events and prevent an attack.

You can also take these actions to help lower your odds of having a panic attack in the future:

Cut back on caffeine * Exercise regularly * Eat a healthy diet * Manage stress

Talk to your doctor before taking herbal supplements or over-the-counter medications.

Certain substances can increase anxiety.