

The Truth About Panic Disorder

Panic disorder is an illness that affects people in their early to middle adulthood. It is characterized by brief, unprovoked episodes of panic. When those with panic disorder experience these episodes of panic, the feelings of intense fear is also accompanied by physical discomfort like a feeling of smothering, hand numbness, and chest pain. The panic episode always begins quickly and usually with no warning, and reaches its peak within ten minutes.

Women are more likely to have panic disorder than men. Medical treatment for panic disorder has proven to be very effective with a positive outcome for two-thirds of those who have the illness. But only a small percentage (10 to 20 percent) are ever fully cured of panic disorder. Every year, 2.4 million people are diagnosed and/or treated for panic disorder.

To get a correct diagnosis of panic disorder, a patient must fit certain criteria. A person with panic disorder who has experienced a panic episode should have had at least one month of the following after the experience:

- ? serious concern about what the attack means and if it is a sign of something more serious
- ? worry about the chance of experiencing more panic episodes
- ? a significant change in routine or behavior following that panic episode.

A person with panic disorder should also experience regular panic attacks with several of the following symptoms:

- ? a racing heart
- ? excessive sweating
- ? pain in the chest
- ? a feeling of lightheadedness and nausea
- ? having a hard time breathing
- ? tingling in the hands, face, feet or mouth
- ? chills or face and chest flushes
- ? an out-of-body feeling like a dreamlike state
- ? intense fear
- ? tunnel vision and an inability to focus on anything but what is causing the panic attacks
- ? crying
- ? extreme fatigue
- ? heightened senses

Panic attacks in panic disorder last on average two to eight minutes.

A person with true panic disorder should have panic attacks that are not brought on by a medical condition like hyperthyroidism, or brought on by substance abuse. People diagnosed with panic disorder are rarely diagnosed with disease if the panic attacks they experience can be explained by another mental disorder like a social phobia.

Panic disorder usually starts in young adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 24. Panic disorder can last a few months or many years. Treatment for panic disorder involves medication and therapy.

While panic disorder is rarely fully curable, appropriate treatment reduces panic attacks in 70 to 90 percent of people. Improvements from the symptoms of panic disorder can be seen as soon as a few weeks after treatment.

Panic disorder is a disabling disease that prevents those who have it from doing the average daily tasks the majority of people take for granted. But the good news is that with effective treatment, those with panic disorder can live happy, healthy, normal lives.

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About the Author

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