

Panic Attacks

What they are and how to cope...

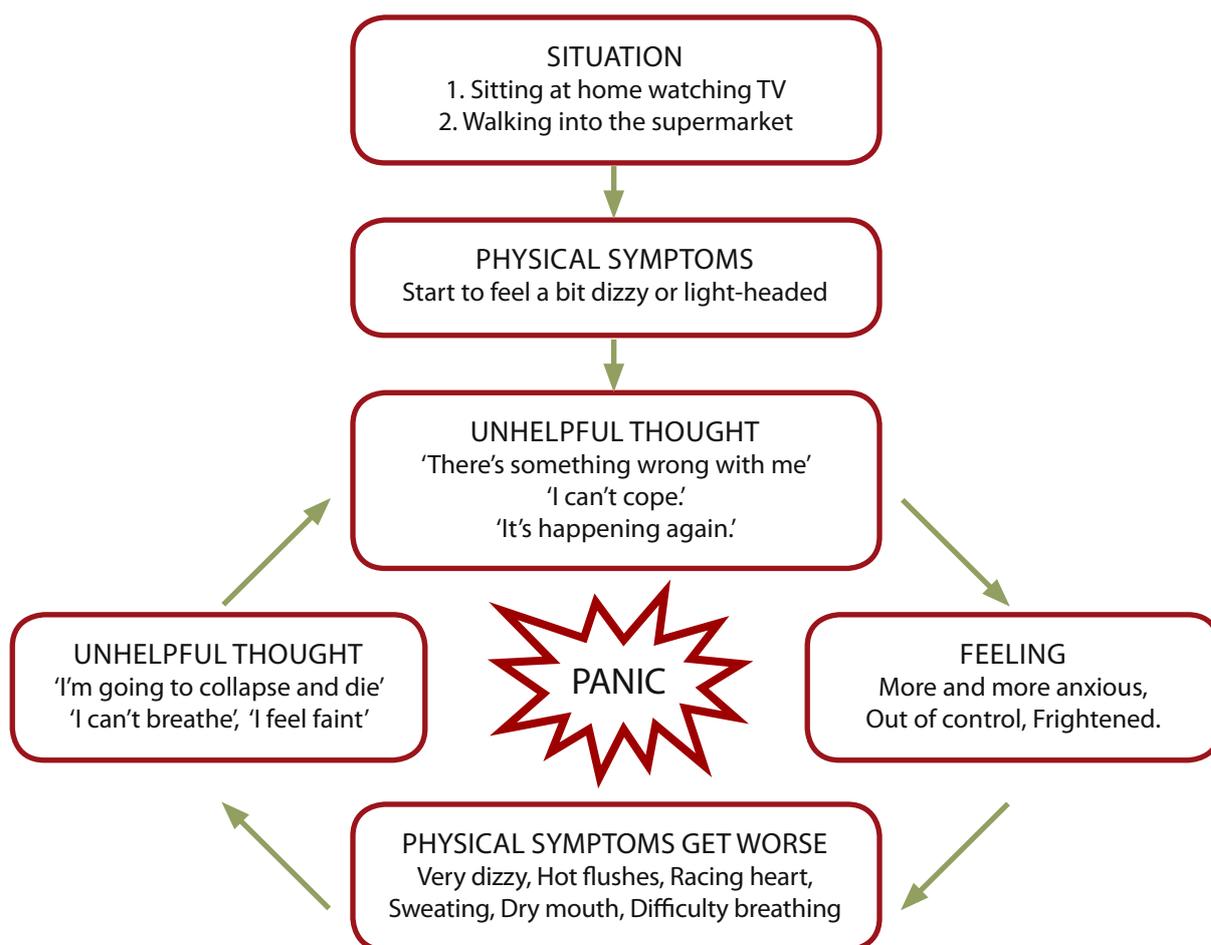
What are panic attacks?

A panic attack can happen when you become very anxious. You feel out of control and may worry that something terrible is about to happen, for example that you are having a heart attack or that you can't breathe. As you get more anxious, your physical symptoms get stronger, and that can become a 'vicious cycle' that makes you feel worse and worse.

Getting out of the situation

Running out of the supermarket, for example – can make you feel better in the short term. But it doesn't help in the long term because it makes it harder to go back to that situation later. So, the best advice is to stay in the situation and let the panic pass by itself, because the fact is that: PANIC ATTACKS ARE NOT DANGEROUS.

This is how a typical panic attack might happen:



This diagram shows how unhelpful thoughts, feelings and physical symptoms all affect each other and build into a panic attack.

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Continued...

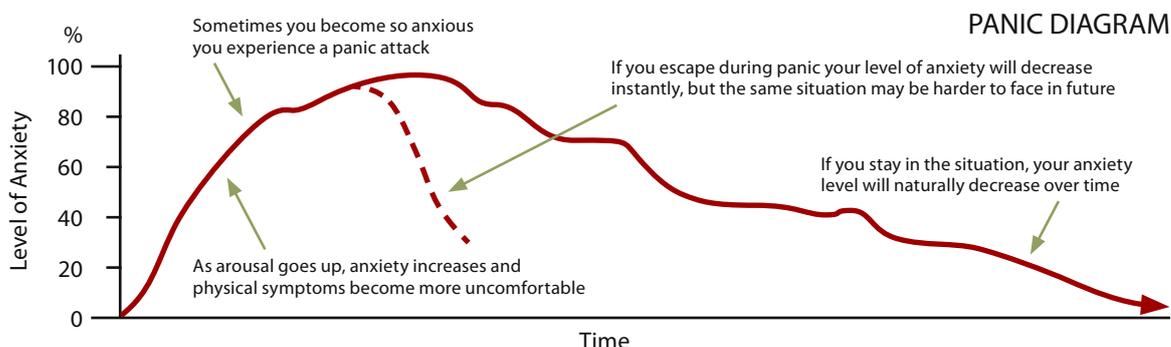
How do I cope with panic attacks?

➔ Try to stay in the situation...

It's natural to want to get away – but if you do, you may feel worse next time, or even not be able to face that particular situation at all in future.

➔ Remember your panic attacks will stop eventually, even if you do nothing...

If you stay in the situation, your feelings of panic will reach a peak and then pass. This will help you to feel more in control next time you are in the same situation. The red line on the graph below shows how your anxiety levels will fall naturally when you stay in the situation.



➔ Keep a diary of your panic attacks...

Write down your physical symptoms and any unhelpful thoughts.

Make a note of how you coped and how you felt afterwards.

When you feel a panic attack coming on, it can be difficult to think clearly.

It might help if you write the following tips on a card and keep it with you to remind yourself what to do.

- Stay in the situation if you can – don't run away!
- Try to keep calm and focus on the moment – don't worry about what you think might happen.
- Always remember – panic attacks are unpleasant and frightening but not dangerous. You can't die from a panic attack.
- You've stayed put and the panic is easing – well done.

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