



Panic Attacks

A panic attack is a sudden onset of intense apprehension, fear or terror. These attacks can begin suddenly and develop rapidly. They are a natural response to something the mind believes will harm us and can last, on average, from three to 10 minutes.

Symptoms

A person having a panic attack will experience several of the following symptoms at the same time.

- Increased awareness of heartbeat.
- Chest pain or discomfort.
- Sweating, trembling or shaking.
- Feeling of choking, shortness of breath or smothering.
- Numbness, tingling or pins and needles.
- Nausea or abdominal distress.
- Feelings of unreality or detachment from oneself or from one's surroundings.
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light headed or faint.
- Fear of losing control or going crazy. Fear of dying.
- Chills or hot flushes.

First Aid Treatment

- Stay calm – it is infectious.
- Speak clearly, slowly and in a reassuring firm manner.
- Acknowledge that their terror feels real; reassure them they are safe and that the symptoms will pass.
- Help them to refocus on something that is non-threatening and visible, such as time passing on their watch. Or ask them to name;
 - 5 things they can see
 - 4 things they can touch
 - 3 things they can hear
 - 2 things they can smell
 - 1 thing they can taste

Panic attack or something more serious?

Ask the person if they have had panic attacks before and are they having one now.

If in doubt, dial 999 and request an ambulance particularly if they are having chest pain.

Paper bags

Do **not** suggest breathing in and out of a paper bag. The danger with a paper bag is that the casualty may become dependent upon it and can panic if they do not have one to hand. It is extremely dangerous to use a paper bag with someone who is having an asthma attack or a heart attack. It can make things considerably worse.

For assistance dial **3333** and request a **Building Based Mental Health First Aider**.