

## **What are "Panic Attacks?"**

**Panic disorder symptoms are becoming an increasingly common disorder. People who suffer from panic often experience several of the following symptoms:**

- **heart palpitations**
- **sweating**
- **increased respiration and hyperventilation**
- **fears that they one is, "going crazy" or having a heart attack**
- **a significant change of behavior related to the attacks. (e.g., avoiding trigger situations)**

## **What Causes Panic Attacks?**

**For many, these attacks seem to come out of the blue. Others associate certain thoughts and fears with situations. Once this happens, a conditioned response develops. The body becomes quickly "trained" to respond to similar situations. So when someone is driving over a bridge, the person becomes fearful of bridges. This conditioning can snowball and generalize to other situations that appear connected.**

**Some medical conditions cause or worsen panic symptoms. They include abnormalities in blood sugar es and hormones such as thyroid. Excessive caffeine intake or abuse of stimulants can also be a factor. Individuals with panic disorder frequently have been seen by doctors at local emergency rooms. The person fears that they are experiencing symptoms of a heart attack. Several emergency room visits may occur with tests that rule out cardiac problems. Such tests are necessary before treatment begins to rule out any physical causes. There is often a complex interplay of genetic, physiological, and psychological issues at work with this disorder. Studies of identical twins and relatives seem to indicate a genetic link.**

**The frequency and severity of panic attacks vary widely. Some people experience them often and others on rare occasions.**

## **Methods of Treatment**

**Fotunately, there are several proven methods for addressing this complex problem. The first step should always be a full medical evaluation by your treating physician. This can rule out any treatable medical problems. (e.g., hypglycemia, hyperthyroid) This condition can be treated with minor tranquilizers such as Valium or Xanax. Minor tranquilizers are quick acting and have a calming and sedating effect. Over the long haul, there can be complications such**

as over reliance or developing a dependency on the medication. Many doctors prescribe antidepressants such as Elavil, Trazadone, Prozac, or Paxil. This class of medications is not addictive but may take 2-4 weeks to really take effect.

If physical causes have been ruled out, there are several psychotherapeutic methods which can be quite helpful. Traditional methods use cognitive behavioral methods with relaxation training. Cognitive therapy helps people look at how you think, talk to yourself, and set the stage for triggering attacks. These methods give you concrete tools for monitoring and confronting troublesome thoughts lead to panic. Other forms of behavioral therapy may involve retraining the body to react calmly to the stressful triggers through increasing amounts of exposure and relaxation training. (aka Implosion Therapy)

A powerful method for dealing with anxiety and panic disorder is E.M.D.R.™ (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) Essentially, this treatment method is an, "information processing model." The method involves certain types of auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic stimulation recalling trigger events. EMDR is one of the quickest methods available today. It has also been validated repeatedly in scientific studies. Please click the above link for additional information on this cutting edge technique.

Thought Field Therapy™ is another innovative technique for dealing with anxiety and other symptoms,. The technique involves teaching clients to self-stimulate different accupressure points while holding in mind the anxious thought, memory, or situation. It's theory borrows from Accupuncture and Applied Kinesiology. You may click the above link to access more information on this form of treatment.

### **Helpful Tips:**

There are some helpful hints that help people to sometimes head off emerging symptoms of panic. One simple tactic is to keep a small paper or plastic bag handy with you. During panic attacks, people often hyperventillate and fear that they are not getting enough oxygen. In reality, they are often getting too much oxygen which causes their symptoms to spiral further out of control. Breathing into a small paper/plastic bag for about thirty seconds can help. By breathing in carbon dioxide (the air that we exhale) the excessive levels of blood oxygen can be brought down quickly. Often this can short circuit an attack and bring it under control.

Talk with your therapist or doctor about your condition. S/he can find a treatment method that works for you.