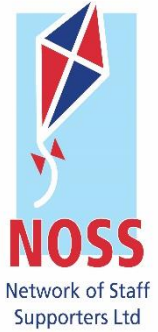




Anxiety and Panic Attacks

“In a Nutshell”



Fear reaction / fight or flight

The body is reacting to the brain's interpretation of a situation as threatening. For example, you are walking down a dark alleyway when two great big snarling dogs leap out with teeth flashing and saliva running down their jaws. There are two options: FIGHT OR FLIGHT. Do we stay or do we run to try and escape the danger?

The fear reaction kicks in to try and save us from any harm. Adrenaline is pumped into the bloodstream; the heart starts pounding; we break out in a sweat.

The fear reaction is at the heart of a panic attack. The sensations involved in the fear reaction and panic attacks are exactly the same. The only difference is that we know why we react the way we did to the Rottweiler's.

In panic the body's normal fear reaction has been switched on by accident.

Below listed are some of the **signs and symptoms** to look out for:

- An increased heart-rate
- Irregular heartbeat
- Pain or pressure in chest
- Feelings of nausea
- Urge to go to the toilet
- Breathing speeds up
- Breathing gets deeper
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling of being smothered
- Tightening of the chest
- Shaking - the result of adrenaline!
- Tingling or numbness
- Increased arousal
- Having too much energy
- Tension
- Increased sweating
- Dry mouth
- Strange taste in mouth
- Feel dizzy / light-headed
- Loss of balance
- Blurred or distorted vision
- Over sensitivity to light / noise
- Easily startled
- Overwhelming sensations of dread
- Loss of concentration

Myths about panic:

- It is never going to end
- I am having a heart attack
- I am going to die
- I am going to faint
- I am going to have a stroke
- I am going blind
- I will be paralysed
- I am going to choke
- I cannot swallow
- I cannot breathe
- I am going mad
- I am out of control

Fear is based on the belief that danger is about to occur. One person panicking may be afraid of a heart attack whereas another may be afraid of “going mad”. The idea of danger is always lurking in our minds, but different people imagine different types of danger during a panic attack.

There is NO evidence or research to prove that anyone has ever died from a panic attack. The chemicals that are released in panic are naturally produced and ultimately is there to protect the body NOT harm it.

What causes panic?

Although there may be no blindingly obvious reason for the first panic attack, there is usually a connection with events in a person’s life. The actual event or events may have happened months ago without any symptoms.

Common stresses are: -

- Death or illness of a partner / relative / close friend
- Operation / disability of a partner
- Marriage problems
- Children
- Family
- Moving to a new house / job
- Own physical health
- Disasters / accidents
- Work
- Financial problems
- Effect of taking illegal or legal drugs / medicines
- After illness
- Separation from partner / family / friends
- Being trapped in an unhappy marriage / over-stressful job
- Losing control of important parts of life such as your job / social life
- Being controlled by parent / partner

Often, there is a combination of problems that create a “system overload”.

Dealing with an anxiety / panic attack

- If a person is having a panic attack, try to calm them down, talking in a soft, calming voice, advising them to slow down their breathing.
- Encourage the person to focus on the problem in hand.
- Discuss the background to the difficulty.
- Explore previous ways of coping and past resolutions to the problem.
- Discuss possible ways forward.