

## What is a panic attack?

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It begins as a quick, maybe unexpected surge of anxiety that stimulates adrenaline and other chemicals in your body, which an individual may misinterpret through thought as dangerous. This belief of "danger" then creates more anxious thoughts and symptoms leading to a panic attack.

Symptoms include many, but not necessarily all, of the following:

- racing heartbeat
- feeling like you cannot breathe
- fear that you are losing control, going crazy or about to die
- sweating, shaking, trembling
- intense terror
- tingling in the hands and feet
- hot flashes or chills
- nausea, stomach discomfort
- chest pains
- dizziness, feeling lightheaded
- feeling detached from reality or oneself

The usual pattern of response is to fear having another attack. You may even begin to avoid places and situations where the attack occurred. Makes sense, right? After all, you're human like the rest of us and you don't like to feel out of control. Unfortunately, avoidance only serves to encourage more panic attacks. They can even spread to other areas of your life like a raging brushfire. This can and will shut down your life if you let it.

You may be happy to know that the experience of this anxiety cannot hurt you (yes, I know it feels like it can). In fact, by reading this now, you are proving that the previous anxiety attack you experienced did you no lasting physical or psychological harm -- aside, of course, from its resulting feeling of fear and harsh blow to your confidence.