

UWE Wellbeing Service

Panic Attacks

Panic attacks are unpleasant and can feel frightening but they are common and not dangerous. This is one of the keys to overcoming panic attacks – remember panic is very uncomfortable but not dangerous.

Panic is a form of fear. It is our body's natural way of preparing us for fight or flight but as there is no actual physical threat it is a false alarm.

Panic attacks can start for various reasons – stress from worries about health, finances, work or difficult emotions that we have not been able to deal with. Sometimes there isn't any clear cause. Occasionally panic attacks may reflect a physical cause and check up with your GP.

Panic attacks are a vicious circle of focusing on our:

- Physical symptoms - what's going on in my body? e.g. Heart palpitations, butterflies, sweating
- Frightening and unhelpful thoughts– what's going on in my mind? e.g. 'I'm going to have a heart attack'
- Unhelpful behaviours – avoiding, escaping or using safety 'rituals' to prevent panic means we never get to find out that nothing bad would have happened.

It is usually possible to overcome panic attacks by understanding more about them, remembering they are unpleasant but not dangerous, and by practicing practical skills to manage your physical symptoms. It is helpful to challenge your frightening thoughts and change unhelpful behaviours, which help to maintain the cycle of panic attacks.

UWE library

- Silove, D., Manicavasagar, V. (2009). **Overcoming Panic and Agoraphobia.**

This is a helpful guide to understanding panic attacks and agoraphobia and to developing self-help skills to overcome and prevent them, using tested techniques from cognitive behavioural therapy. **Available at all campuses** [shelf: 616.85223 SIL](#)

- Ingham, C. (2001) Updated Edition. **Panic Attacks.**
[Available: Alexandra Warehouse, Bower Ashton, Frenchay, Glenside](#)

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Websites

- **Centre for Clinical Evidence** - CCI self-help workbooks on 'Panic Stations'. A detailed set of 'modules' to help understand and then start to overcome panic <http://tinyurl.com/hv7gn76>
- **Get self-help** provides clear, practical, evidence-based advice for understanding and managing a range of problems including panic attacks www.get.gg/panic
- **Help Guides** - Another useful starting point for self-help <http://tinyurl.com/objzqx>
- **Mind** - has a useful introduction to panic attacks <http://tinyurl.com/z78zkbp>
- **NHS Guide to Panic** - A brief but helpful guide to understanding and starting to manage panic <https://tinyurl.com/y9unxeel>
- **NHS Website** - Another intro with a particular focus on the physical/medical aspects <http://tinyurl.com/65oqlhm>

Videos

- **NHS Moodzone:** Panic attacks – video describing the cycle of panic attacks and explains how to tackle this. <http://tinyurl.com/zhyqw58>
- **Zoella** - Video blogger (a Digital Ambassador for Mind) talking very openly about how she suffered with panic attacks for nine years before deciding she had to stand up to the panic. <http://tinyurl.com/jm2d26b>

Apps

- **Stop Panic and Anxiety Self-Help** - (on android) learn to control panic and get relief from anxiety focusing on the fear of having a panic attack <http://tinyurl.com/z7r4brd>
- **Panic Attack Aid** – a well-rated app that offers breathing techniques, reassurance and distraction exercises. <http://www.panic-attack-aid.com/>
- **SAM** – a highly rated app to help you understand and manage anxiety, developed by UWE, Bristol <http://sam-app.org.uk/>