

Panic Attack First Aid

What a panic attack is, why it cannot hurt you, and steps to ride one out. Educational overview.

A panic attack is a sudden rush of fear with strong physical symptoms: a pounding heart, tight chest, dizziness, or a sense of unreality. It feels dangerous, but it is your alarm system firing when there is no real threat. It peaks within minutes and it always passes.

In the moment

- Remind yourself: this is a panic attack, it is not dangerous, and it will pass.
- Slow your breathing. Breathe out for longer than you breathe in, for example in for four and out for six.
- Drop your shoulders, and unclench your jaw and your hands.
- Name five things you can see and four you can hear, to come back into the room.
- Let the wave rise and fall instead of fighting it. Fighting it only adds fuel.
- Stay where you are if you safely can, so your brain learns the place is not the danger.

Panic attacks are common and very treatable, and cognitive behavioral therapy works well. If they keep happening or you start avoiding places, talk with a clinician. If you ever have new chest pain or symptoms you are unsure about, get medical care to be safe.

Learn more: [Fight or Flight Response at shrinkdaily.com/concept/fight-or-flight-response](https://shrinkdaily.com/concept/fight-or-flight-response)

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