

MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

## PANIC ATTACK



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A panic attack is a discrete episode of intense anxiety

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A panic attack can be very scary, but it is not life threatening or dangerous

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A worldwide study found that the lifetime prevalence of panic attacks was 13.2%

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The DSM-V defines a panic attack as an abrupt surge of intense fear or discomfort that reaches its peak within minutes, and involves four (or more) of the following symptoms:

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1. Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate
2. Sweating
3. Trembling or shaking
4. Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering

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5. Feelings of choking
6. Chest pain or discomfort
7. Nausea or abdominal distress
8. Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint
9. Chills or heat sensations

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10. Paresthesias (numbness or tingling sensations)
11. Derealisation (feelings of unreality) or depersonalisation (being detached from oneself)
12. Fear of losing control or "going crazy"
13. Fear of dying

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Panic arises for most people from an already anxious state, or following a stressful trigger or a previous traumatic experience, but sometimes, it comes completely out of the blue

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Most people have recurrent panic attacks.  
Some people just have the one episode.  
Only a small number of people who have experienced a panic attack actually meet the diagnostic criteria for Panic Disorder.

de Jonge, P et al. (2016)

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In a yoga class, a student could experience a panic attack if they feel unsafe

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We can reduce the likelihood of this by consciously creating a safe container

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A panic attack could also happen as a result of a yoga practice, including Kapālabhātī Prāṇāyāma, breath retention after the inhalation, or extreme 'heart opening' practices

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Never offer these practices to a group of students who you know are anxious

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In meditation, a student could be triggered by a visualisation or an internal experience

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Always give the students the option to practise with their eyes open, let them know that they're in the driver's seat and can stop whenever they like, and support them to cultivate inner and outer resources

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If a student has had a traumatic experience, there could be something about the class that triggers the memory and leads to either anxiety or panic

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## WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE HAS A PANIC ATTACK



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What to do if someone has a panic attack:

Remain calm

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What to do if someone has a panic attack:

Speak to the person in a patient, reassuring and firm manner, using short and clear sentences

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What to do if someone has a panic attack:

Ask them if they have had a panic attack before. If they say yes, and they believe they're having another one, ask what you can do to help

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What to do if someone has a panic attack:

Acknowledge how terrifying panic attacks are while reassuring them that it's not dangerous. Let them know that they're safe and that the symptoms will pass.

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What to do if someone has a panic attack:

Once the panic attack has subsided, ask the person if they have support

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What to do if someone has a panic attack:

If you're not sure if the person is having a panic attack or not, follow first aid guidelines

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What to do if someone has a panic attack:  
If the person loses consciousness,  
follow first aid guidelines, check for  
breathing and call an ambulance

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For more information visit the  
Mental Health First Aid Australia  
website and download the Panic  
Attack Guidelines

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## PANIC ATTACK

Yoga can be a wonderful support for a  
student experiencing panic attacks

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A student might feel safer and get  
more benefit from individualised yoga  
with a yoga therapist or attending a  
specific class for anxiety or trauma

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Always stay within your scope of practice and refer to someone who has experience with panic attacks



T H A N K   Y O U