

UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH PANIC ATTACKS



ABOUT US

Credit Valley Counselling and Psychotherapy provides compassionate, evidence-based support for individuals, couples, and families. We offer a safe space to explore challenges, strengthen coping skills, and work toward meaningful emotional wellbeing.

WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?

A panic attack is a sudden and intense surge of fear or physical discomfort that comes on quickly, usually peaking within 5–10 minutes. Even though the symptoms can feel alarming, a panic attack is not dangerous. It is the body's "fight-or-flight" system switching on at the wrong time.

During a panic attack, the brain misreads normal bodily sensations (like a fast heartbeat or stress) as a sign of danger. It sends out an emergency alarm, releasing adrenaline and causing strong physical symptoms. These sensations can feel like something is seriously wrong, but they are temporary and not harmful.

A photograph of a person with long dreadlocks, wearing a beige hoodie, sitting on a couch and covering their face with their hands in a gesture of distress or panic. The background shows a modern interior with a large green plant and a window.

**PANIC IS A FALSE ALARM
FROM THE BODY'S
DANGER SYSTEM**

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Rapid heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Sweating
- Dizziness
- Numbness or tingling
- Nausea
- Trembling
- Fear of losing control



COPING STEPS

01 Notice What's Happening

Identify that you are having a panic attack. Remind yourself that the sensations are intense but not dangerous.

02 Slow Your Breathing

Inhale gently through your nose for 3 seconds. Pause. Exhale slowly for 6 seconds. Repeat until your body begins to settle.

03 Ground Yourself In The Present

Use your senses. Name things you can see, hear, touch, or feel. Bring your focus to your environment instead of the sensations.

04 Relax Your Body

Drop your shoulders. Unclench your jaw. Remind your body that it is safe.

05 Stay Put Until The Wave Passes

Avoid fleeing the situation unless unsafe. Remaining in place helps your brain learn that the situation is not dangerous.

06 Reflect Afterwards

Once calm, acknowledge what helped and what you managed well. This strengthens coping skills for next time.

HELPFUL STATEMENTS

- “This will pass”
- “My body is safe”
- “These sensations are uncomfortable, not dangerous”
- “I have gotten through this before”





FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT



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