

PANIC ATTACKS 101

by Rebecca Ogle, LCSW

Panic attacks can be incredibly scary. The good news? They are only temporary, and although it may not feel like it in the moment, you *will* survive.

AM I HAVING A PANIC ATTACK?

The most common symptoms of panic attacks include...

- Increased heart rate / heart palpitations
- Sweating
- Shaking or trembling
- Difficulty breathing / hyperventilation
- Racing thoughts
- Excessive worry

Other symptoms include...

- Nausea
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Hot and cold flashes
- Feeling as though you may be having a heart attack or dying



BIOLOGY OF PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks occur when the **sympathetic nervous system**, commonly known as the "fight, flight, or freeze" response, is triggered. This response evolved in humans over time because it helped us survive when our lives were in danger.

Our bodies may inaccurately perceive danger and trigger the fight, flight or freeze response when we don't need it. When this happens, we can kick-start the **parasympathetic nervous system**, or relaxation response, using coping skills.

HOW TO COPE WITH PANIC ATTACKS

SHORT-TERM

1 Splash cold water on your face or take a cold shower. This will "shock your system," almost like a re-set button for your body.

2 Count 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste.

3 Take *slow* breaths in through your nose to the count of 4, and out through your mouth to the count of 8.

LONG-TERM

1 Write down what you were doing and thinking before each panic attack. See if you can identify triggers of the attacks.

2 See a licensed therapist to help you decrease the frequency and intensity of your panic attacks, and address any root causes.

3 See a psychiatrist who can prescribe you medications to help with panic attacks, or advise you about holistic treatment methods.