

# Anxiety Attack

## Definition

- Sudden attacks of overwhelming, intense symptoms
- Symptoms: fast, deep breathing (hyperventilation), fast heart rate and feeling dizzy. The body goes on total "red alert".
- Thoughts and Feelings: fear of dying, total loss of control
- Also called a panic attack

## Health Information

### Anxiety Attacks: Facts

- Happens in 1-2% of people.
- Risk factors: Anxiety attacks are genetic. They tend to occur in families.
- Age of onset: teens or young adults
- Cause: Release of stress hormones as when "under attack"
- Triggers of attacks: life stressors; though many attacks are unexpected
- Length of attacks: attacks last 20-30 minutes
- How often attacks occur: no set pattern
- Side effect: patient avoids social settings for fear of having an attack
- Treatment if frequent: Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and SSRI meds can help

## Care Advice

### 1. Reassure Your Child During an Anxiety Attack:

- During a panic attack your teen feels overwhelmed by fear.
- Sometimes, they even fear that they are dying.
- Tell your teen that the symptoms are scary, but harmless.
- The symptoms will stop, most often in less than 30 minutes.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

### 2. Help Your Teen Relax:

- Do anything that has helped in the past.
- Try to help your teen put herself into a relaxed state.
- How to relax: lie down in a quiet place. Relax every muscle in your body, from head to toe. Think about something pleasant. Pretend you are in a favorite place.
- Since fast breathing is often part of a panic attack deal with that first. Try to get your teen to slow their breathing.
- Once breathing is under control, the panic attack will often end.

3. **Stop any Fast Breathing:**
  - Reassure your teen they are healthy and the symptoms are from fast breathing.
  - Talk in a calm voice.
  - Getting control of their breathing will often stop the anxiety attack.
  - Help your teen slow down to 1 breath every 5 seconds (12 per minute).
  - Try to breathe quietly instead of deeply.
  - Try to do belly-breathing, instead of chest breathing. Move your belly button out and in versus raising the shoulders up and down.
  - Try to breathe through the nose with the mouth closed.
  - Caution: Re-breathing into a paper bag is not recommended. Reason: it can make the attack worse.
4. **Anxiety Attacks - Find the Triggers:**
  - Try to find the events or triggers that bring on anxiety attacks.
  - Keep a diary of attacks.
  - Write down what happened just before the attack started. Include details of where you were and what you were doing. Also write down the main symptoms, how long it lasted, and what helped.
  - Look for patterns of things that trigger attacks.
  - Avoid events that make your child anxious.
  - If it can't be avoided, teach your child how to cope with those times.
5. **Prevention - Reduce Future Anxiety:**
  - Help your child talk about events that trigger the anxiety. Talk about how to cope with these triggers next time they occur.
  - Help your child worry less about things he or she can't control.
  - Exercise every day. Being active helps your body deal with stress.
  - Teach your child the importance of getting enough sleep (at least 8 hours each night). You can cope with stress better if you get enough sleep.
  - If over-achievement is the cause of your child's anxiety, help your child find more balance.
  - Do something fun and relaxing every day. Examples are playing music, walking, reading, or talking with friends)
6. **Avoid Caffeine Products:**
  - Avoid or reduce drinks with caffeine in them. (Reason: it is a stimulant and can make anxiety worse).
  - Examples include coffee, tea, colas, and energy drinks.
7. **What to Expect:**
  - Symptoms of panic most often stop in less than 30 minutes.
  - Future attacks will occur, so learn how to manage them.
8. **United States Hotlines and Helplines - NAMI Helpline:**
  - National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI)
  - The NAMI Helpline is an information and referral source for finding community mental health programs.
  - National toll-free phone number: 800-950-NAMI (6265)

## Call Your Doctor If

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- Panic attack does not end within 30 minutes using this advice
- Panic attacks become more frequent
- Your child has never been seen for these attacks
- You think your child needs to be seen

### **Pediatric Care Advice**

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