

## **Panic Disorder**

**Definition:** Panic disorder is an anxiety disorder with persistent and usually unexpected panic attacks. These panic attacks are marked by the continual fear of future attacks, shifts in behavior to avoid future attacks, or both of these issues, for at least one month.

**Symptoms:** The symptoms of panic disorder include two types of panic attacks: expected or unexpected. Expected panic attacks are those that occur due to a specific fear, such as the fear of flying. Unexpected panic attacks occur suddenly or out-of-the-blue without any clue that a panic attack is about to happen. These unanticipated panic attacks are the hallmark feature of panic disorder. Attacks typically last about ten minutes, but can last as few as 1-5 minutes or up to an hour or until there is a helpful intervention. Common symptoms of an attack include: rapid heartbeat, perspiration, dizziness, trembling, overwhelming fear, choking, chest pain, paralysis, crying, and thoughts of impending doom.

**Causes:** Panic disorder has been found to run in families. Often the first attacks are triggered by physical illness, major stress, or some medications. People who take on an excessive amount of responsibility tend to develop a tendency for panic attacks.

**Treatment:** Cognitive Behavioral therapy (CBT) and Positive Self Talk specifically for panic are the treatments of choice for panic disorder. A combination of psychotherapy and medication can often produce good results. For some people, anxiety can be greatly reduced by eliminating caffeine and alcohol.