Panic Disorder

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What Is Panic Disorder?

Anxiety is the natural response of the human body to stressful or dangerous situations. Even though that all people have experienced anxiety in certain situations and accept this as normal this may not be the case for a person with anxiety disorder. People with anxiety disorder often experience sudden feelings of panic and fear, and this may last from several minutes to half an hour. These sudden conditions are called anxiety attacks. They occur suddenly and during them people feel intense fear without any obvious or real danger. This may include fear of losing control, fear of dying, feelings as if we are not in our body. Anxiety attacks may also be accompanied with strong physical symptoms like dizziness, short breath and increased heart rate. There is not a certain pattern of how anxiety attacks occur and many people with anxiety disorder often worry a lot about the possibility of having another anxiety attack.

This situation and the intense fear of having another attack may lead to agoraphobia. Agoraphobia and anxiety disorder have a close relationship but are different conditions. Agoraphobia is the condition when people have fear of open spaces or crowded places. Often people with anxiety disorder think that certain places or situations trigger their anxiety attacks and avoid them.

Often people with anxiety disorder feel ashamed of their condition as they slowly became incapable of performing normal daily activities as going to the supermarket or using public transportation. The feeling of shame and fear of another anxiety attacks only aggravates the situation and make it more difficult to search for help.

What are the Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder and Panic Attacks?

There are many people who experience panic attacks only once or twice in their life without any complications. Usually if you have only one or two anxiety attacks there is no reason to worry. However, there are people who experience panic attacks and start to worry about having another and in time develop panic disorder. Panic disorder is the condition when a person experiences repeated anxiety attacks without any obvious reason and become anxious about having another anxiety attack. If you recognize some of the following symptoms you may be suffering from panic disorder:

- You experience sudden anxiety attacks on a regular basis
- You worry a lot about having another anxiety attack
- You avoid places that you believe trigger your anxiety attacks

Anxiety attacks often appear out of nowhere and often people do not recognize them. In most cases the anxiety attack lasts between ten and 15 minutes and the most severe can last up to half an hour. The symptoms are both psychological and physical and often people confuse the anxiety attacks with a heart attack or some other medical condition. The most common symptoms of an anxiety attack include:

- Increased heart rate

- Intense fear of dying or losing control
- Sweating
- Trembling and shaking
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath

Next page: the causes of panic disorder and how to treat anxiety.

What are the Causes of Panic Disorder?

Till now the studies are have not shown what the exact cause for panic disorder is. However, there are certain factors or combination of factors that can increase the risk of anxiety disorder. This includes:

- **Panic disorder may be inherited** – studies show that there is high risk to suffer from panic disorder if it has been in the family before
- **Drug and alcohol abuse** – the studies show that 30% of people suffering from anxiety disorder use alcohol
- **Caffeine and smoking** – the use of caffeine and tobacco can increase the risk of having anxiety attacks and developing anxiety disorder
- **Major life transformations or long exposure to stress** – this can include death of close people, divorce or losing your job

How Can You Diagnose Panic Disorder?

Due to the fact that most of the people think that the panic attacks are just a period and will fade away, their condition is sometimes very difficult to diagnose. And this is not because the symptoms are not obvious but because often people do not pay attention to them or refuse to seek help. If you think that you may have developed anxiety disorder, the first thing that you have to do is call your GP. It is important to be honest and tell your GP exactly how you feel. The criteria to be diagnosed with anxiety disorder is experiencing sudden and repeatable anxiety attacks which are followed by at least one month intense and continuous worry about having another attack.

Possible Treatments for Anxiety

Although anxiety disorder can cause discomfort and change our normal lifestyle dramatically, the condition is highly treatable. There are two main possibilities for treating anxiety disorders. These are psychotherapy and medication. In some of the most severe cases, anxiety can be treated with a combination of medication with therapy.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is the most common and the most successful method of treating an anxiety disorder. In most cases, therapists use cognitive behavior therapy which is extremely useful as a treatment. The core of this therapy is that it shows a person how to change his attitude, how to change reactions and change the way of thinking in positive way. This process helps to ease the symptoms of panic attacks and slowly take control of them as the final step is to decrease the anxiety attacks to minimum and get total control over them.

Medication

As a way of treatment your doctor can decide to prescribe you medicine. The most common medications that are used for anxiety disorder treatment are antidepressants. Usually antidepressants are used to treat depression but they can also be used for anxiety disorders. If you have decided to start medication as a treatment, you have to consider some important facts. Certain medications can have side effects, you will have to take drugs for a certain period of time and only under the supervision of your doctor.