

Panic Attacks

More and more teens today are suffering from one or other form of anxiety. In fact, latest research indicates that anxiety is considered as one of the top 5 mental disorders in the general population.

A panic attack is a sudden surge of mounting physiological arousal that can occur "out of the blue" or in response to encountering (or merely thinking about) a phobic situation. Bodily symptoms that occur with the onset of panic can include heart palpitations, tightening in the chest or shortness of breath, choking sensations, dizziness, faintness, sweating, trembling, shaking, and/or tingling in the hands and feet. Psychological reactions that often accompany these bodily changes include feelings of unreality, an intense desire to run away, and fears of going crazy, dying, or doing something uncontrollable.

Anyone who has had a full-fledged panic attack knows that it is one of the most intensely uncomfortable states human beings are capable of experiencing. Your very first panic attack can have a traumatic impact, leaving you feeling terrified and helpless, with strong anticipatory anxiety about the possible recurrence of your panic symptoms.

A panic attack can be a very frightening and uncomfortable experience, but it is absolutely not dangerous. You may be surprised to learn that panic is an entirely natural bodily reaction that simply occurs out of context.

Suppose, for example, that your car stalled on the railroad tracks while a train approached you from about 200 yards away. You would experience a sudden surge of adrenaline, accompanied by feelings of panic, and a very strong and sensible urge to flee your predicament.

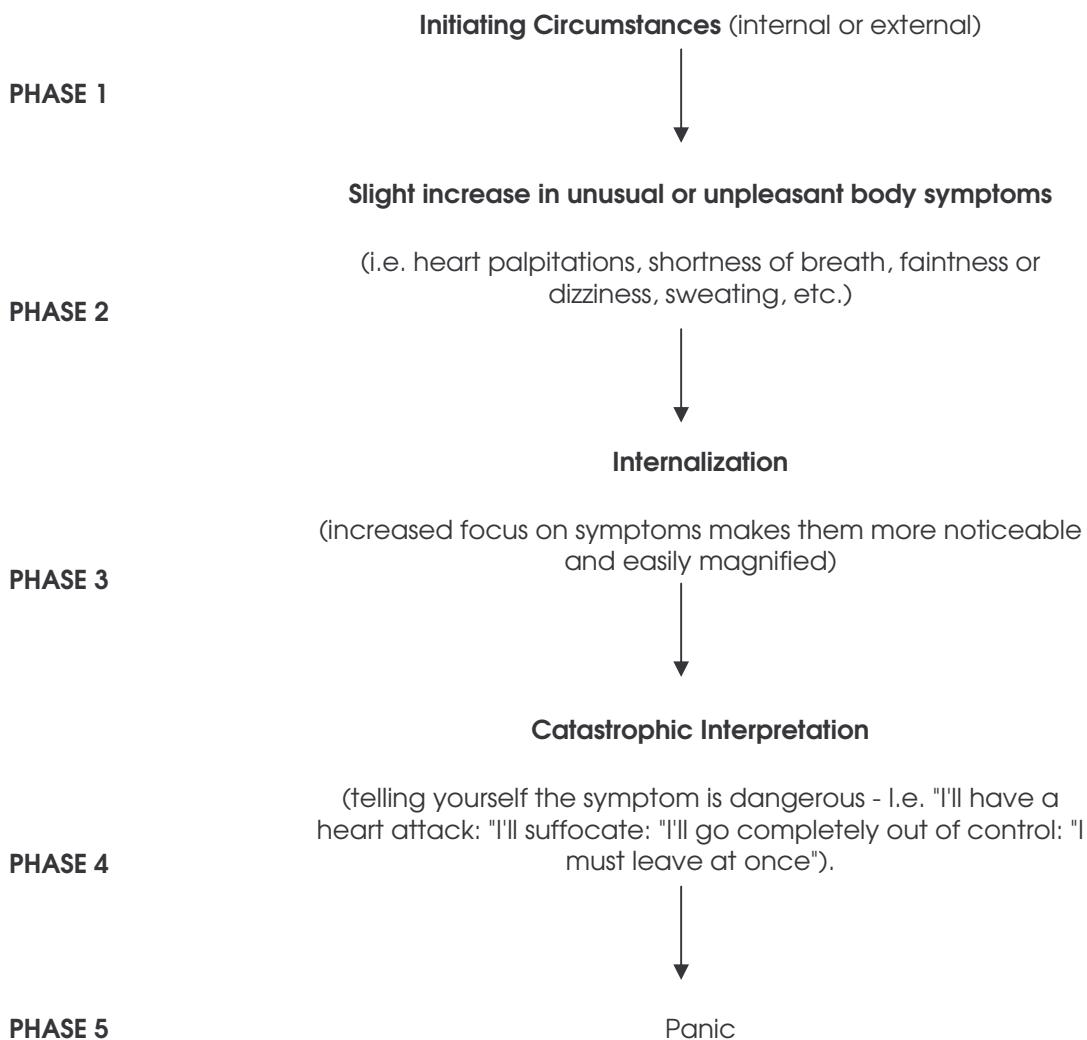
In a spontaneous panic attack, your body goes through exactly the same physiological flight reaction that it does in a truly life-threatening situation.

What makes a panic attack unique and difficult to cope with is that these intense bodily reactions occur in the absence of any immediate or apparent danger.

Because there is no immediate or apparent external danger in a panic attack, you may tend to invent or attribute danger to the intense bodily sensations you're going through. In the absence of any real life-threatening situation, your mind may misinterpret what's going on inside as being life-threatening.

The diagram below illustrates this tendency:

DEVELOPMENT OF PANIC ATTACK



The good news is that it's possible to intervene at any point in this sequence.