

# What a Panic Attack Feels Like

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Imagine that you're taking a stroll in the countryside. Everything is going well. The trees are in bloom; the sky is blue; the cool breeze is refreshing. You're humming your favorite tune when suddenly you hear a blood curdling scream – **EEEEOOOOWWWW!!!!**

Now imagine that out of nowhere, a repulsive creature has stepped into your path. He's got a grotesque body, horns on his head and a menacing smile. You freeze in terror as this hideous face stares into yours!

Though you desperately wish to flee, you find yourself helplessly frozen. Your heart is racing. Your chest is pounding. You can't catch your breath. You feel lightheaded. You feel faint. You think you might die right there on the spot.

Now imagine feeling this very same terror when there's no creature in your path. What would your experience be? Would you feel mystified? Bewildered? Embarrassed? Wonder if you're going crazy?

This is the experience of those who endure [panic](#) attacks. Many keep their experiences secret, for they are embarrassed and at a loss for words to describe what happens to them. Nobody else has ever had such a reaction, or so they believe. Panic attacks, however, are more common than you may think.

The word "panic" emanates from the ancient Greeks, who were said to experience overwhelming terror when they encountered Pan, their god of nature. Half man, half beast, Pan had a scream so intense that terrified travelers who happened upon him in the forest died from fear.

In our modern world, we don't believe in Pan. But we do have plenty of fears that paralyze us. Those who have had panic attacks are fearful of having another one. So they avoid being in places or situations in which they feel vulnerable or where there's no quick and easy escape. For some, this means they can't be alone. For others, it means they can't be with new people or in crowds of people. In their attempt to create a safe life, they inadvertently create a small life.

Some panic attacks are not so omnipresent, occurring only when zero hour draws near. Students panic before an exam. Hosts panic before their guests arrive. Actors panic before the curtain rises. Working folks panic before their annual evaluations. Patients panic before their medical test.

When family and friends witness the panic, they typically offer well-meaning advice. "Just relax." "Chill out." "Take it easy." "Roll with the punches." Easy to say. Hard to do.

If the panic doesn't subside, many people confide in their physicians. They are then prescribed anti-[anxiety](#) medication. At first, these meds may take the edge off. Over time, however, nothing changes. So, the medication is increased or another drug, usually an anti-

depressant, is added to the mix. Fogginess, sleepiness and lethargy now become additional issues that the panicky person needs to deal with.

There's a better way to treat panic attacks. It involves a combination of:

- Cognitive [therapy](#) (changing your thought patterns and internal dialogue)
- Behavioral therapy (gradually exposing yourself to scarier situations)
- Body therapy (controlling your breathing and muscle relaxation)
- Adjunct medication, if needed, to calm your body down.

If you or a loved one are sweating bullets over an upcoming event, feeling frenzied about the future, restricting your life to cope with your fears or shuddering at the thought of another panic attack, don't shrug your shoulders and assume that nothing can be done. Actively seek appropriate treatment that can help you master your fears and get on with your life.

*For more information about strategies and skills that can help you move forward, read my book, "Master Your Fears: How to Triumph over Your Worries and Get on with Your Life," available at Amazon or at [www.PsychWisdom.com](http://www.PsychWisdom.com)*