

Ten Tips for Recovery Panic Disorder

1. **Learn about panic disorder.** “Fight or flight” is your body's natural defense to danger. Panic happens when your body's flight or fight system runs amuck. You have learned to be afraid of this natural reaction. You will gain power and control over your reactions when you understand the causes of your anxious feelings and correctly interpret your body's reactions to stress. Although panic attacks are scary, they are not heart attacks. They are not life-threatening.
2. **There is a three step process** that has been used for many years to treat panic disorder. First, you receive education about anxiety and panic disorder. Next, you learn breathing and thinking skills to help you confront the situations that cause anxiety. Finally, you will work with your therapist to slowly expose yourself to the panic sensations in your body and situations that cause them.
3. **Avoidance is your enemy.** Panic disorder gets worse when you avoid the things you fear. Avoidance may give immediate relief, but it can also make the situation worse in the long run. When you avoid things you fear, your body and your mind cannot learn to correctly assess the feelings you get when you have a panic attack. The sensations are part of the fight or flight system; they are not harmful.
4. **Change your breathing pattern.** Many people with panic disorder tend to hyperventilate. You may be breathing short shallow breaths throughout the day, which makes it easy to then feel panicky. Learning to breathe properly throughout the day and while having a panic attack can help reduce physical sensations of anxiety and panic.
5. **Change the way you think.** People with panic attacks tend to tell themselves some pretty scary things. You can work with your therapist on learning skills to be more aware of your thinking and how it fuels your anxiety and panic. You will learn how to use your thoughts to deal with your anxiety, not to avoid it.
6. **Take medications as agreed.** Medication will not cure anxiety disorders, but they may help you manage the symptoms while you receive psychotherapy.
7. **Create support through family, friends, and peer support groups.** Family and friends can help you face and overcome your fears. Sharing your problems and successes with others in a self-help or support group may also be helpful.
8. **Be hopeful.** Set personal goals. You can learn to manage your anxiety and have a full and productive life.
9. **Keep a journal.** You may find that there are certain situations that trigger your panic. By paying attention to these triggers and writing them down, you can learn to recognize them and to manage your reactions.
10. **Stress management techniques** such as meditation can help people with anxiety disorders calm themselves and may enhance the effects of therapy. Also, aerobic exercise may have a calming effect. Be aware that caffeine, certain illicit drugs, and even some over-the-counter cold medications can aggravate the symptoms of anxiety disorders.

