Panic: GP information sheet

Panic attacks are sudden waves of intense fear with strong physical sensations. They can feel frightening, and some people may begin to worry about having another. Panic is common, and support is available.

About this sheet. We have written this sheet as psychologists, in the hope that GPs may find some of it useful. It offers general information only and is not a clinical tool.

How it may show up in everyday life

Some people, or the people close to them, may notice things like these. They can look quite different from one person to the next.

During a panic attack

- The heart might race
- Breathing could feel tight
- People may feel dizzy or shaky

Afterwards

- People might feel exhausted
- Worry about another attack may linger
- Confidence could feel shaken

Everyday places

- Shops, transport or driving might feel harder
- Some people may stay closer to home
- Having a companion could feel reassuring

At work or study

- Busy settings might feel daunting
- Concentration may drift
- Some days could feel harder than others

In the body

- People might become very aware of body sensations
- Exercise may feel worrying
- Caffeine could feel unsettling

In relationships

- Loved ones may want to help
- Plans might change at short notice
- People may feel misunderstood

What the person might be bringing

People may have felt very frightened by their experiences. They might worry that something is seriously wrong, or feel embarrassed about what happened.

A warm, curious conversation may help it feel safer to talk. Feeling heard can be a meaningful first step.

What GPs already do well

Opening gently

GPs are often the first person someone feels able to talk to. A calm, gentle opening can help people share what they have been through.

Listening to the story

GPs often know the person, and sometimes their family, over many years. That wider view of someone's life can be very valuable.

A steady point of contact

GPs can offer a calm, familiar presence as people explore their options, working alongside other professionals.

Seeing the whole person

GPs often hold the bigger picture of someone's health and wellbeing, which can be very reassuring.

What psychology may offer

Understanding

- Time to make sense of experiences
- Learning about how panic works
- Recognising strengths as well as challenges
- A safe space to talk

Practical support

- Calming and breathing skills
- Gentle steps back toward places that matter
- Online programs, where they suit
- Working alongside the GP and other professionals

Everyday things some people find helpful

These are simply possibilities. What helps one person may not suit another.

- Slow, steady breathing
- Grounding with the senses
- Less caffeine
- Regular movement
- Gradually returning to valued places
- Being patient with themselves

Trusted Australian resources

Beyond Blue beyondblue.org.au

THIS WAY UP thiswayup.org.au

MindSpot mindspot.org.au

Referring to Strategic Psychology

Our psychologists work with children, adolescents and adults. If a client would like to see one of our team, they can call us on 02 6262 6157 or visit strategicpsychology.com.au. Medicare rebates may be available with a GP referral.

This sheet offers general information for GPs to consider. It does not replace clinical judgement.