



Panic attack versus Heart attack:

How to tell the difference

If you experience rapid breathing, a racing heart, and an unfamiliar feeling in your chest, you may be wondering if you're having a heart attack or a panic attack. Since they share some symptoms, it can be difficult to distinguish the two.

Understanding the differences between these two conditions can help you better manage your symptoms and get appropriate treatment.

What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is a sudden, intense episode of fear or discomfort that peaks within minutes. These episodes often happen without warning and are marked by a range of physical and emotional symptoms. Many times, these symptoms are so severe that you may think you're having a heart attack.



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What are the symptoms of a panic attack?

A panic attack is an abrupt surge of intense fear or intense discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes. During this time, four (or more) of the following symptoms occur:

- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded, or faint.
- Heart palpitations, pounding heart.
- Excessive sweating.
- Trembling or shaking.
- Sensations of shortness of breath, difficulty breathing.
- Feeling of choking.
- Chest pain or discomfort.
- Nausea or abdominal distress.
- Feeling of unreality or being detached from oneself.
- Fear of losing control or "going crazy".
- Fear of dying.
- Numbness or tingling sensations.
- Chills or hot flashes.

What is a heart attack?

A heart attack happens when a part of the heart muscle doesn't get enough blood. The more time that passes without treatment to restore blood flow, the greater the damage to the heart muscle. If you suspect you're having a heart attack, visit your nearest Hospital or Emergency Room immediately for treatment.

How do you know the difference between having a

panic attack and a heart attack?



It's difficult to tell the difference because their symptoms can be very similar. Look at the symptoms below as it can help you to know when to seek medical help.

PANIC ATTACK - PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Sharp, stabbing pain in middle of chest.
- Symptoms reach a peak within minutes.
- Pain that gets better in minutes.
- Racing heart rate.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweating
- Shakiness
- Tingling in the hands.

HEART ATTACK SYMPTOMS

- Squeezing pain and pressure in chest.
- Pain that radiates to the arm, jaw, or shoulder blades.
- Pain gets worse over time.
- Longer lasting symptoms.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweating
- Nausea and vomiting.

* It is always important to rule out any medical conditions before a diagnosis of panic attack can be made.



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What happens if you don't treat panic attacks?

You may be so afraid of having more panic attacks that you live in a constant state of fear. It can affect your quality of life so it's very important to get help as soon as possible.

Where can you turn to for help?

Panic attacks, while intensely uncomfortable, are not dangerous. They are hard to manage on your own, and they may get worse without treatment. If you need help, contact our Mental Health Services on 014 590 1700 or 080 000 6942 to book an appointment.



Alternatively contact our EAP Counsellors on 010 133 0525 who are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to offer you counselling and support.



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