



## Information Sheet: Panic Attacks

### What is a panic attack?

Many people experience panic attacks. Panic attacks are extremely frightening physical symptoms of high levels of anxiety. Attacks seem to come out of the blue, making you feel powerless and out of control. Sometimes they can make you feel as if you are going to die. They can happen for no obvious reason. However it is possible to learn to manage to panic attacks and eventually stop them from happening altogether.

### What are the symptoms of a panic attack?

Symptoms can include:

Hyperventilating (breathing faster)

Sweating or flushed skin

Increased heart rate

Dry mouth

Dizziness

Tense muscles

These symptoms are caused by a rush of adrenaline into your bloodstream, preparing your body to face or flee from danger. Panic attacks cause a loss of carbon dioxide which can make you feel light-headed and faint. If no danger is present, these symptoms can leave you confused and anxious.

### How you can help yourself:

If you can learn to relax, the panic attacks will pass by on their own. Once you realise you can control your attacks - and that they are not harmful - you will feel more able to go into situations in which you have experienced the panic.

**Try these ideas:**

- Give yourself time to calm down by breathing slowly and deeply
- Try cupping your hands over your nose and mouth, or holding a paper bag and breathing into it (removing every two to three breaths) for about 10 minutes
- Distract yourself by trying to focus on what is happening around you

**Remember:**

- However bad you feel, the panic attack is not harmful or dangerous
- The increased heart rate caused can lead to distress and this make things even worse
- Your heart rate will be no more active than if you had been jogging
- Eventually your usual way of breathing will return
- Once you stop adding to your frightening thoughts, the level of fear will drop

**How CCL can help:**

Talking to someone that you can trust can make a difference as you will feel less alone. A counsellor can help you to identify the causes of your panic attacks as well as supporting you in overcoming them. We offer free counselling to people, aged 16 and over, living in Ryedale and, where appropriate, in Scarborough. We work with a wide range of presenting issues, including panic attacks. You can be referred by your doctor or any other NHS worker.

**Other sources of information:**

Anxiety UK - tel: 08444 775 774 (9.30 – 5.30 Mon. to Fri.) or go to the website - [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk). [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) also has useful leaflets to download.

'Understanding Panic Attacks - And Overcoming Fear' by Roger Baker.

CCL Relaxation Information Sheet on our website.