PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks – also known as anxiety attacks – are among the most mysterious and unforgiving of mental illnesses. They are mysterious in that researchers have yet to learn why they occur and unforgiving in that attacks can occur any time without warning.

During a panic attack, a person feels an overwhelming sense of anxiety marked by sweating, chest pains, trembling and other signs of distress (See list below). While an attack may last only a few moments, its effects may linger. Some panic-attack sufferers have a fear of future attacks - for example, someone who suffers an attack while driving may not drive again out of fear of triggering another attack.

Diagnosis a panic attack can be difficult. Attacks mimic such physical ailments as heart disease and thyroid and respiratory problems. People afflicted by panic attacks report several doctor and emergency room visits before a correct diagnosis is confirmed.

Once the problem is identified, however, a combination of therapy, medication and changes in lifestyle can help most sufferers lead normal lives.

If you or someone you know may have suffered a panic attack, talk to someone in the Employee Assistance Program where you work.

What to Look For

Experiencing any four signs from the following list may signal that you’ve had a panic attack, according to the American Psychiatric Association. The APA warns, however, that not all attacks or all people have the same symptoms.

- Sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Chest discomfort
- Unsteady feelings
- Choking or smothering sensations
- Tingling
- Hot or cold flashes
- Fainting
- Trembling
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Feeling of unreality
- Fears of losing control, dying or going insane

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