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Date sent 11/05/2014 02:11:49 pm
Subject: Top 3 Things You Should Know About Panic Attacks

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Mental Health First Aider eNews

In this week's issue, we discuss the top 3 things you should know about panic attacks: what they are, what they look like, and how you can help using your Mental Health First Aid skills.



What is a Panic Attack

A panic attack is a sudden onset of intense anxiety, fear, or terror that often occurs for no clear reason. Panic attacks can occur at any time—even in your sleep. Panic attacks peak around 10 minutes, but the physical symptoms can extend for a longer period of time. Panic disorder is when a person experiences recurring panic attacks and is persistently



TRAINING & EVENTS



Interested in becoming a Mental Health First Aid instructor? [Check out](#) our recently announced National Council-hosted instructor trainings in California, South Carolina, Tennessee, New Mexico, and Texas.



FAST FACT



More than **1 in 5 people** will experience a panic attack in their lifetime.

2.7% of adults will develop a panic disorder within a given year.



worried—for at least 1 month—about possible future panic attacks and the consequences of panic attacks. Some individuals with panic disorder go on to develop agoraphobia: avoiding places due to the fear of having a panic attack. [Learn more.](#)



What Do Panic Attacks Look Like

The physical signs and symptoms that accompany panic attacks look very similar to those of a heart attack: racing heart, sweating, shortness of breath, chest pain, and dizziness. In fact, up to 25% of people who visit emergency departments for chest pain are actually experiencing a panic attack. Other symptoms may include terror, upset stomach, nausea, hot flashes, chills, trembling, feelings of needing to escape, and fear of dying. [Learn more.](#)



How Should You Respond

Here are some reminders for administering Mental Health First Aid to someone who you suspect is having a panic attack (pg. 110 in adult manual; pg. 147 in youth manual):

- Ask the individual if they need help. If you don't know the person, introduce yourself.
- Ask if the person knows what is happening or if they have previously had a panic attack.
- If you are unsure whether the event is a panic attack or a heart attack, seek emergency medical assistance.

- If it is a panic attack, reassure the person of what he or she is experiencing, and that while frightening, a panic attack is not life-threatening and the symptoms will pass. Be patient, speak slowly and clearly, and use short sentences.
- Ask the individual how you might be able to help, and try to accommodate as best you can (i.e. help them sit down or find a non-public place).

Once the panic attack has ended:

- Offer information about where the person can learn more about panic attacks. Try the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) and [HelpGuide.org](#).
- Tell the person that if the panic attacks persist, he or she should speak to a health professional



ALGEE Tales: First Aid for Panic Attacks

Anne* delivers Mental Health First Aid to a colleague experiencing a panic attack.

**Please note – names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.*

I received training about two years ago from staff at Mental Health America. Just yesterday, I used ALGEE when a staff member pulled me aside and informed me that another staff member was outside crying, “freaking out,” and that he said his chest hurt. I recognized that it might be a panic attack...He was visibly shaken and he had tears in his eyes...After 15 minutes, he calmed down enough to talk. I listened nonjudgmentally about what stressors he was facing (he confided this was not his first panic attack). I gave reassurance and reminded him that through our employer we had access to three free counseling sessions.

Share your story with [Laura Roth](#) to be featured in an upcoming First Aider eNews!

Mental Health First Aid USA is coordinated by the National Council for Behavioral Health, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Missouri Department of Mental Health.

CONTACT

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