



## **Mental Health America of Franklin County**

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# **Anxiety Disorders: Panic Disorders**

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Everyone feels anxious or uneasy from time to time. Your first day on a new job, planning for a long trip, going to the dentist....your palms sweat, you feel shaky, your heart pounds. *Some* anxiety helps to keep you focused on the job at hand.

However, when your anxiety is so serious that it interferes with your work, leads you to avoid certain situations or keeps you from enjoying life, you may be suffering from a form of the most common type of mental disorder, an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorders are not just a case of "nerves." You can't overcome an anxiety disorder just through willpower, nor can the symptoms be ignored or wished away. These disorders cause you to feel anxious most of the time, making some everyday situations so uncomfortable that you may avoid them entirely. Or, you may experience occasional instances of anxiety that are so terrifying and intense that you may be immobilized with fear.

Although these conditions can be very frightening and disabling, they are also very treatable. It is important to recognize the symptoms and seek help.

Specifically, **Panic Disorders** can cause feelings of terror that strike suddenly and repeatedly without warning. These attacks usually last about ten minutes, but in some cases they may last up to an hour. Because they cannot be predicted, many people develop intense anxiety between episodes, worrying about when another attack will strike.

### **Symptoms may include:**

- Pounding heart
- Sweating
- Feeling weak, faint or dizzy
- Numbness or tingling feeling in hands
- Feeling flushed or chilled
- Chest pain or smothering sensations
- Sense of unreality
- Fear of impending doom or loss of control

- Fear of a heart attack or a stroke
- Fear of losing one's mind
- Fear of dying

## **Treatment**

Studies have shown that cognitive-behavioral therapy, medications, or possibly a combination of the two, helps most people with panic disorders. Two types of medications that have been shown to be safe and effective in the treatment of panic disorder are antidepressants and benzodiazepines. Significant improvement is usually seen within 6-8 weeks. It is crucial to comply with treatment, and to work closely with the therapist in order to achieve success.

**Behavioral therapy** focuses on changing specific actions and uses different techniques to stop this behavior. One technique involves *diaphragmatic breathing*, which is a form of deep breathing. Another technique called *exposure therapy* gradually exposes the patient to the object or situation, which frightens him/her and helps the patient to develop coping skills.

**Cognitive-behavioral therapy** teaches the persons new skills in order to react differently to the situations, which trigger the anxiety or panic attacks. Patients also learn to understand how their thinking patterns contribute to the symptoms and how to change their thinking to reduce or stop these symptoms.

**Mental Health America of Franklin County** is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; community and professional mental health education and a newsletter for first-time parents available in both English and Spanish. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board and United Way of Central Ohio. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at [www.mhafc.org](http://www.mhafc.org).