



ADHD & Panic Attacks

Fact Sheet for ADHD Women

What a Panic Attack Is

A panic attack is a sudden, intense burst of fear that peaks within minutes. Your body goes into fight-or-flight even without real threat. Panic attacks are **not harmful** and do **not mean you're losing control**, even though they feel that way.

How Panic Attacks Are Experienced

Physical: Rapid heartbeat, trouble breathing, chest tightness, dizziness, trembling, sweating/chills, nausea, tingling

Emotional: Sudden dread, fear of losing control or dying, feeling detached or unreal

Panic attacks peak in 5–20 minutes. Intense but not physically dangerous.

How Panic Shows Up Differently in ADHD Women

- **Quick escalation:** ADHD brains process emotional signals intensely—panic can seem to come from nowhere.
- **Weaker early noticing:** Difficulty detecting early body cues means anxiety builds until it hits threshold suddenly.
- **Sensory/cognitive overload:** Noise, visual stimulation, and mental load can trigger panic more easily.
- **Hormonal shifts:** Panic often changes across menstrual cycles and perimenopause.
- **Rejection sensitivity:** Fear of rejection can precede or accompany panic, making it feel more personal.

What Helps During a Panic Attack

Name it: 'This is a panic attack, not an emergency.'

Breathe: Inhale 4 counts, exhale 6–8 counts.

Ground: Press feet into floor, hold cold water, name 5 things you see.

Cold water: On face or eyes—activates calming reflex.

After a Panic Attack

Exhaustion, shakiness, teariness, and brain fog are normal—your nervous system just ran a big response. Support recovery: water, balanced snack, low stimulation, gentle movement.

When to Seek Support

Urgent care: New chest pain, fainting, major breathing difficulty, or panic that feels different.

Mental health support: Panic is frequent, worsening, causes avoidance, or paired with depression/self-harm thoughts.

Takeaway: In ADHD women, panic often feels more intense because internal signals process differently, emotion escalates quickly, early cues are missed, and sensory load is higher. Panic episodes **do not mean you're broken**. With understanding and support, panic can become less frequent and less distressing.

This fact sheet is educational and does not replace medical evaluation or treatment. Consult a qualified provider for diagnosis and care.

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