



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

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

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

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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