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Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
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Panic Attacks: Effective Ways to Cope

By Michael G. Rayel, MD

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Jill is a 21 y/o college student who used to do well until about a few months ago when she started to experience "weird" attacks almost daily. She described her experience as "horrible." When she has the attack, she feels that she's about to die or develop a stroke.

One day while she was in a mall, she suddenly developed an "overwhelming" sensation all over her body. She was sweaty and tremulous and felt that her heart was pumping so fast. Within a few seconds, she also suffered from chest pain and shortness of breath. This episode lasted for about 10 minutes but she felt that this was her worst ten minutes of her life.

Overwhelmed by her experience, she has stayed away from malls and has avoided being in a crowd of people. Because of the frequency of the attacks, Jill can't anymore function normally. She is afraid to leave the house and go to work.

Jill's experience is typical of someone with Panic Disorder. A person with panic disorder develops anxiety attacks associated with the thought that he or she would die or develop a stroke or heart attack. Physical changes such as fast heart beat, shortness of breath, fainting episodes, sweating and tremulousness are some of the accompanying symptoms.

A typical episode usually comes "out of the blue" and not precipitated by any triggers. It can therefore happen any time and anywhere. An attack can last for a few to several minutes.

One episode can make a person feel scared of having another one. In fact, a lot of people feel distressed anticipating the occurrence of another attack. So most individuals prefer to stay at home and isolate themselves from friends, co-workers, and even relatives. Eventually they become incapacitated.

If you're like Jill, is there any treatment that can help?

Yes, there is. Individuals with this condition are successfully treated with an antidepressant such as the serotonin–reuptake inhibitors. Usually, the dose should be started low, for instance 10 mg/day of citalopram. After a few weeks, the dose should be gradually increased depending upon the person's clinical status.

Cognitive behavior therapy is likewise very effective. This type of "talk psychotherapy" helps the individual to restructure his or her thinking. Negative cognition associated with the illness should be addressed in therapy because it creates more harm than good. Relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises should also help.

During treatment, patience is very important because it takes a while before any intervention helps. However, don't despair. After a few weeks, the medication should start working and should give you a feeling of comfort.

What's the role of benzodiazepines (e.g. lorazepam or clonazepam) in the treatment of panic disorder? This type of drug can provide acute relief but should be used only on a short–term basis because of its addiction potential. For long–term treatment, antidepressants and psychotherapy are still preferable.

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Is What You Feel A Panic Attack?

By Kelly Gillis

Your heart pounds, your palms sweat, you start shaking, you get short of breath. You experience a fear that seems overwhelming that came absolutely out of nowhere, and for no reason. You could have been driving your car, or awakened out of sleep, or at your desk performing your daily routine at your job. Perhaps it's the first time it's happened, perhaps not. If it's not you probably know that you aren't going to die, but you feel like it. If it's the first time you are scared to death.

No one really knows what causes a panic attack to come on. Some medical professionals say that they can be related to heredity, some say to stress. Some say if you have a history of other mental disorders, such as depression or some phobias you are more likely to experience panic attacks. Know that you are not alone. It is estimated that one out of three adults will suffer a panic attack in their lifetime.

Some professionals have broken down panic attacks into three distinct types, spontaneous, specific and situational. A spontaneous panic attack would be as suggested by its name, one that happens unexpectedly. Panic attacks called specific are brought on, as also suggested by its name by specific repeated situations, and situational panic attacks may come while doing a certain type of activity, such as riding a bike, even though there is no panic or fright involved with the activity.

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Some people suffer from a panic attack only once. These may be panic attacks which are brought on by major life stresses and ease after the stress is eliminated. Some suffer from repeated panic attacks. The type of help you seek for panic attacks and the type of help you are given by medical professionals will be based on how many panic attacks you suffer from. Some health care professionals and organizations seek to treat people who suffer from infrequent panic attacks with a step program, similar to that used with alcoholics anonymous. Some medical professionals will treat more severe and recurrent panic attacks with medication. Generally patients who suffer from repeated panic attacks will benefit by being referred to a psychologist or psychiatrist for counseling.

To learn more about panic attacks

please visit



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