



THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP

NPO 013-085 Reg. No. 2000/025903/08

P O Box 652548 Benmore 2010

Tel: +27 11 262 6396

Fax: +27 11 262 6350

zane1@hargray.com

www.sadag.co.za

FAST FACTS ABOUT PANIC

- 2-4% of the population will suffer from panic disorder at some point in their lives.
- Panic is twice as common in woman as it is in men.
- For women, the average age of onset is during their early twenties, whilst for men it is in their forties.
- The average length of a panic attack is 4 – 6 minutes
- Panic affects people of all races and classes.
- Recent research shows that there is a strong genetic or hereditary component that predisposes people to panic. Attacks can be triggered by stressful life events or occur “out of the blue”
- Before panic disorder is diagnosed, a medical examination should be carried out to exclude other medical conditions.
- Panic disorder is frequently misdiagnosed as a thyroid problem, hypoglycemia or a heart valve problem.
- Up to 30% of people with panic disorder misuse/abuse alcohol. 17% abuse drugs, and up to 20% attempt to commit suicide.
- Whilst panic disorder typically occurs in adults between the ages of 20 – 40 years, it can also affect children and the elderly.
- Homeopathic treatments, for example, St Johns Wort, and acupuncture may be of some benefit in treating panic disorder.
- Caffeine, cold and flue medications, Lariam (anti-malarial drug), appetite suppressants and local anaesthetics may trigger panic attacks.
- Between 50% and 75% of people with panic will avoid certain places and activities. This can lead to social impairment, greater than that of major depression.
- Before receiving a diagnosis of panic, South Africans will on average visit eleven doctors and spend over R20 000 on medical investigations.
- Treatment (usually) includes a combination of medication, psychotherapy and self-help. (for example, reading, support groups, or relaxation techniques).
- Antidepressant medications and tranquilizers are usually used to treat panic, since they “repair” the underlying chemical imbalance
- The good news: Panic disorder is a highly treatable condition. With the right combinations of therapy, 90% of people recover fully. The remaining 10% experience significant recovery.

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