



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

# Managing Panic Disorder

Together with your mental health care team, you'll gain new understanding about your diagnosis, as well as strategies to help you cope. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

## Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

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| <b>Panic Disorder</b>                     | Panic disorder is a diagnosis given when someone experiences panic attacks, seemingly out of the blue (they can even occur while someone is sleeping), without the presence of an actual threat or danger.  |
| <b>Panic Attack</b>                       | The sudden onset of intense fear or discomfort that peaks within a few minutes (then begins to subside) and has at least four physical symptoms of anxiety.   |
| <b>Anxiety</b>                            | Extreme apprehension that is accompanied by unpleasant symptoms like feeling nervous, irritable or on edge, having a sense of impending doom or danger, increased heart rate, breathing rapidly, sweating or trembling, feeling weak or tired, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, and gastrointestinal problems. |
| <b>Agoraphobia</b>                        | In the case of those with panic disorder, a diagnosis of agoraphobia may be given when someone spends an inordinate amount of time avoiding locations or situations in which they fear a panic attack might occur.  |
| <b>Psychotherapy</b>                      | Also referred to as "talk therapy," this is any type of service provided by a professional that uses talking, communication or interaction to assess, diagnose and treat a mental health issue.   |
| <b>Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)</b> | This type of therapy has been found to be very effective for Panic Disorder and focuses on identifying, understanding, and then changing thinking and behavior patterns through cognitive restructuring and behavioral techniques.  |
| <b>Mindfulness</b>                        | A mental training practice that involves paying attention to the present moment, on purpose and without judgment.   |
| <b>Relaxation Techniques</b>              | When you feel yourself begin to panic, or you feel your anxiety begin to increase, there are various tools that you can use to calm your nervous system, including breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, going for a walk, aromatherapy, music, or partaking in an enjoyable activity.                                     |
| <b>Antidepressants</b>                    | Antidepressant medications like Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (or SSRIs) have been found to be effective in relieving the symptoms of anxiety.  |
| <b>Benzodiazepine</b>                     | While these medications don't treat the underlying causes of anxiety, they can be effective in treating the symptoms, quickly. Benzodiazepines are very addictive and should be used cautiously.  |



### Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage panic disorder.

#### About Symptoms

- What is happening in my brain and in my body that causes my panic symptoms?
- Even though I know that I am not in any real danger, when I am having a panic attack, the symptoms feel dangerous. What can I do be less afraid of my panic attack symptoms?
- When I feel my anxiety rising, or I begin to panic, is there anything I can do to lessen or stop the attack?
- What are ways that I can slow down my heartrate, racing thoughts, and rapid breathing?

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#### About Causes & Risk Factors

- Is it possible that an underlying medical condition might be causing, or contributing to my symptoms?
- What factors in my life might be contributing to my anxiety? How can I address those factors to lower my anxiety and to keep it from intensifying?
- Are there any foods, beverages, or medications I should avoid that might be contributing to my anxiety and panic?

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#### About Treatment

- I know that exercise, diet, and sleep play a big role in mental health and anxiety. What sorts of changes should I be making to help reduce my anxiety?
- What sort of therapy do you think I should pursue? Why do you think that particular type of therapy will be best suited for me?
- Do you think therapy will be enough, or do you think I should speak to a psychiatrist about possibly incorporating medication into my treatment plan as well? Why or why not?

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