What is panic disorder?

A panic attack is a sudden intense fear that triggers strong physical reactions when there is no real danger. Panic attacks are very scary. During an attack, it may feel as if you’re losing control, having a heart attack, or dying. People with panic disorder have unexpected, repeated panic attacks and become constantly worried about having more attacks. They make major changes to their life and behavior to try and avoid panic attacks.

What does it mean to have panic disorder?

* Sudden, repeated panic attacks of strong anxiety and fear
* Physical symptoms during an attack, such as a pounding or racing heart, sweating, breathing problems, weakness or dizziness, nausea, feeling hot or cold, tingly or numb hands, chest pain, or stomach pain
* A feeling that you’re going to lose control or die
* An intense worry about when the next attack will happen
* A fear or avoidance of places where panic attacks have occurred

What causes panic attack disorder?

It’s not known what causes panic attacks or panic disorder, but factors such as genetics, temperament, major stress, and environmental factors likely play a role. Research suggests the body’s natural fight/flight response to danger is triggered during a panic attack, but it’s not clear why.

Reference: National Institute of Mental Health. Panic Disorder: When Fear Overwhelms *(2016)*. Retrieved June 25, 2019.  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/panic-disorder-when-fear-overwhelms/index.shtml>

Are there other problems from panic disorder?

Yes, some people may be develop specific phobias, such as fear of driving or being in groups, depression, and alcohol and substance use.

How can I help myself if I have panic disorder?

First, talk to health and wellness staff about your symptoms. They will do an exam to make sure that a physical problem isn't causing your symptoms.

While in Job Corps, our goal is to help you understand and manage your condition so you can move toward finding employment. Treatment may include medication, brief therapy, and/or participation in groups and activities.

* Request to meet with the CMHC or Center Physician (CP). The CP can evaluate your symptoms and make sure you physically healthy
* Ask for reasonable accommodations, if needed
* Stay on your medication, if prescribed
* Practice stress management techniques like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation
* Avoid caffeine, illicit drugs, and even some over-the-counter cold medications which can worsen the symptoms of anxiety disorders
* Get regular physical activity
* Remind yourself that panic attacks aren’t dangerous—they are the body’s fight/flight/freeze response. They are unpleasant but harmless and will pass.
* Move your body (walk, stretch) and focus your attention outside yourself (describe what you see, hear, smell) during a panic attack
* Be patient about your symptoms; improvement takes time

I know someone who has panic disorder. What can I do?

* Remain calm during the panic attack
* If they are thinking about hurting them self or someone else get help immediately
* Let the nearest Job Corps staff member know
* Do not leave the person alone
* Encourage deep, slow breathing
* Get person to quiet place
* Get emergency care if having heart attack warning signs (e.g., chest pain, shortness of breath), unless you are sure the person has a history of panic attacks with similar symptoms and has been medically cleared
* Encourage person to schedule appointment with CMHC and/or CP
* Access the Job Corps Safety Hotline (844-JC1-SAFE) via text, email, phone, mobile app or web site