

# Understanding Panic Attacks

*A Psychoeducation Resource for Muslim Clients*

**Clinical note:** *Safety note: if you have chest pain, severe shortness of breath, pain radiating into your arm or jaw, or loss of consciousness, call 000 (Australia). First panic episodes should be medically assessed to rule out cardiac causes.*

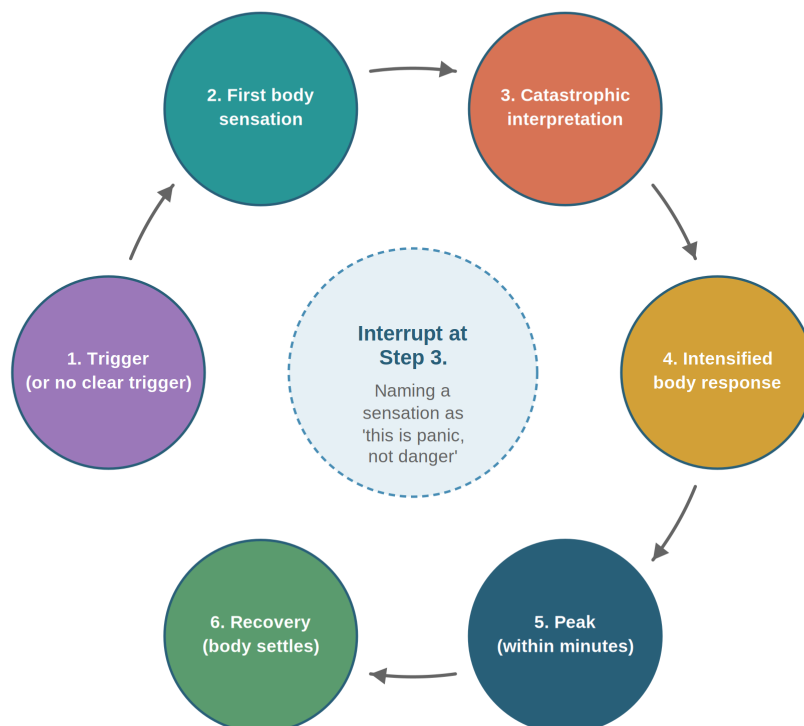
## What Is a Panic Attack?

A panic attack is a sudden surge of intense fear or discomfort that peaks within minutes. The body activates its threat response with great intensity, often where there is no actual external danger. Panic attacks are frightening but not dangerous.

## The panic cycle

### The Panic Cycle

*How a small sensation spirals into a panic attack, and where to interrupt it*



Every panic attack ends. The body cannot sustain the response indefinitely.

*The cycle has six steps. The critical intervention point is Step 3: naming the sensation as 'this is panic, not danger' before the catastrophic interpretation takes hold.*

## Section 1: What Is Happening in the Body

Most panic symptoms have one biological explanation: fight-or-flight activating when there is no danger to fight or flee.

Racing heart: the body is preparing for action.

Shortness of breath: rapid breathing reduces CO<sub>2</sub>, which causes dizziness.

Tingling, numbness: caused by CO<sub>2</sub> change. Not dangerous.

Dizziness: blood redirected from head to muscles. Not dangerous.

Chest tightness: chest muscles tensed. Not damaging once cardiac ruled out.

Trembling, sweating: body primed for exertion.

Feelings of unreality: brain narrowed onto threat. Not dangerous.

## Section 2: What Helps During a Panic Attack

### Step 1: Name it

'This is a panic attack. It is frightening but not dangerous. It will pass.'

### Step 2: Slow exhale

Breathe in for 4 counts, out for 6 to 8. Slow, not deep.

### Step 3: Ground

5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you touch.

### Step 4: Do not run

If safe, stay where you are. Let the body learn that you survived.

### Step 5: Du'a

حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

*Hasbun-Allahu wa ni'mal-wakeel.*

“Sufficient for us is Allah, and He is the best disposer of affairs.”

*Qur'an, Surah Al-Imran, 3:173.*

## Section 3: After a Panic Attack

- Drink water and allow rest
- If safe, return to what you were doing
- Note what happened, without self-criticism

### Brief reflection

Where I was, what I was doing, what I noticed first:

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What I told myself during it:

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What helped, even slightly:

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## Section 4: Reducing Future Panic Attacks

### Daily practices

- Slow breathing practice (not only during panic)
- Regular sleep schedule
- Reducing caffeine
- Regular gentle exercise
- Daily salah as anchored pauses

### Avoiding avoidance

Gradual return to feared places, with breathing and grounding practised in advance, is the evidence-based approach.