Panic Attacks

POWERED BY 23ANDME RESEARCH

Panic attacks are episodes of intense anxiety accompanied by physical sensations like hyperventilation and a pounding heart. They can occur any time and without a threat of danger. While panic attacks can be scary, they're not harmful to your physical health.

Jamie, your genetic result is associated with a **typical likelihood** of having panic attacks.

An estimated **29 out of 169** people with genetics and other factors like yours have experienced panic attacks **by their 30s.** This is within what is considered typical, which can be anywhere from 8 to 24 out of 169 people. These values were calculated using data from female 23andMe research participants of European descent.

29 out of 169 have experienced panic attacks
60 out of 169 have not experienced panic attacks

This estimate is based on currently available data and may be updated over time.

This genetic result is only one part of your story

Genetic factors can help explain the likelihood of experiencing panic attacks. But this genetic result doesn't mean that you definitely will or won't experience panic attacks. This is because most of a person's overall likelihood of experiencing panic attacks is explained by factors not accounted for in this result, including other genetic factors and non-genetic factors like stressful life experiences.

That's also why, **if you have already been diagnosed** with panic attacks or panic disorder by a healthcare professional, this genetic result does not change that. It is important to work with your healthcare provider and continue any management plan that is recommended.

Factors that impact overall likelihood

- Factors included in this result (certain genetic factors, birth sex, and ethnicity)
- Other factors

Ways to take action

While the likelihood of having panic attacks is impacted by some factors that can't be changed—like genetics—it's also impacted by some things that can. Certain healthy lifestyle habits can lower overall anxiety levels, which in turn can reduce the chances of having a panic attack:

- Move your body. Exercise—especially aerobic exercise—can be grounding and relieve anxiety.
- Explore relaxation techniques like meditation and yoga.
- Practice breathing techniques, which can help counteract hyperventilation in the moment. One technique is box breathing, where you fill your lungs while slowly counting to four, hold your breath for four counts, exhale completely for four counts, and hold for four counts. Then repeat the steps a few more times.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco, which can trigger panic attacks for people who are prone to them.
- Learn the symptoms. Recognizing when a panic attack is happening can help make it less scary.
- Try not to let panic attacks restrict your activities, as this can worsen anxiety and panic attacks over time.

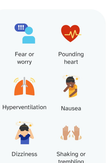
Learn more about managing anxiety from the Anxiety report.

About panic attacks

What are panic attacks?

Panic attacks are episodes of intense fear with many physical symptoms. They can be triggered by certain situations or they can seem to occur out of the blue. They are caused by an activation of the body's fight-or-flight response when there isn't anything immediately dangerous happening. Often, panic attacks start happening during especially stressful times in life.

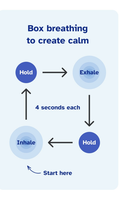
Panic attacks are common. Up to 1 in 3 people will experience one in their lifetime. If panic attacks are frequent and continue over time, they may be diagnosed as panic disorder. Panic attacks can also occur as a symptom of other anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other mental health conditions.



What are the symptoms of panic attacks?

Panic attacks can have many symptoms, including:

- Sense of danger or impending doom
- Fear of losing control or dying
- Pounding or racing heart
- Hyperventilation (rapid, shallow breathing)
- Nausea or abdominal cramping
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Shaking or trembling
- Chest pain
- Sweating



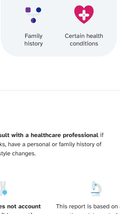
In addition, people who have had panic attacks can develop a persistent fear of experiencing another one. This can negatively impact quality of life, if individuals avoid situations or places where panic attacks have occurred in the past.

Sometimes panic attack symptoms can resemble symptoms of other health problems, including heart attacks. If you have new or concerning symptoms, talk to a healthcare professional to evaluate what could be causing them. A healthcare professional can also help find a treatment plan that's right for you and connect you to support like counseling.

Ways to manage panic attacks

If you do find yourself having a panic attack, there are some steps you can take in the moment to get through it more easily.

- Slow down your breathing. Use the breathing exercises you've practiced, like box breathing, to quickly help counteract hyperventilation and calm the fight-or-flight response.
- Try to stay put. Waiting for the panic attack to subside, rather than leaving the situation that triggered it, allows your nervous system to learn the situation is safe.
- Ride it out. Remember that panic attacks usually subside within 5-20 minutes.
- When it's over, you might feel tired. Take some time to rest and recharge.

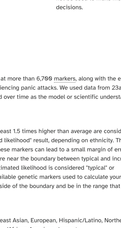


Learn more about panic attacks from **HelpGuide.**[1]

Factors that impact the likelihood of experiencing panic attacks

Researchers believe that genetics combine with other factors to influence how likely an individual is to experience panic attacks. Non-genetic factors that can increase this likelihood include:

- Age—panic attacks are more common in younger adults
- Experiencing major life stress or traumatic events, like the death of a loved one
- Having a family history of panic attacks or panic disorder
- Certain mental health conditions, such as anxiety disorders and PTSD
- A history of trauma or abuse in early life



Keep in mind

This report **does not diagnose panic attacks or panic disorder. Consult with a healthcare professional** if you are concerned about whether you may be experiencing panic attacks, have a personal or family history of panic attacks, or before making any major lifestyle changes.

If you have already been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder or other mental health condition by a healthcare professional, it is important to **continue any management plan** that is recommended.

The likelihood of experiencing panic attacks also depends on **other factors**, including life experiences and family history.

This report **does not account for every possible genetic variant** that could affect your likelihood of experiencing panic attacks.

This report is based on a genetic model **created using data from 23andMe research participants.** It has not been clinically validated and should not be used to make medical decisions.

How we got your result

Methods

This report is based on a statistical model that takes into account your genetic results at more than 6,769 markers, along with the ethnicity and birth sex you reported in your account settings, to estimate the likelihood of experiencing panic attacks. We used data from 23andMe research participants to calculate this estimate. Results and estimates may be updated over time as the model or scientific understanding about this condition improves.

About the result

People whose result is associated with odds of experiencing panic attacks that are at least 1.5 times higher than average are considered to have an increased likelihood. Between 7% and 17% of individuals receive an "increased likelihood" result, depending on ethnicity. These results are based on many genetic markers, and random test error at one or more of these markers can lead to a small margin of error in your estimated likelihood of experiencing panic attacks. For people whose estimates are near the boundary between typical and increased likelihood, this margin of error may introduce some uncertainty about whether their estimated likelihood is considered "typical" or "increased." Your genetic result is associated with a typical likelihood. Based on the available genetic markers used to calculate your result, there is a less than 1% chance your genetic likelihood estimate could fall on the other side of the boundary and be in the range that is considered increased.

Scientific validity across ethnicities

We verified that the model meets our scientific standards for individuals of East/Southeast Asian, European, Hispanic/Latino, Northern African/Central & Western Asian (Middle Eastern), South Asian, and Sub-Saharan African/African American descent.

How we may use ethnicity and birth sex to customize this result

- If you indicated in your account settings that you are of East/Southeast Asian, European, Hispanic/Latino, Northern African/Central & Western Asian (Middle Eastern), South Asian, or Sub-Saharan African/African American descent, your result is tailored based on data from individuals of that ancestry.
- If you indicated in your account settings that you are predominantly of both Hispanic/Latino and another ancestry, your result will be based on data from individuals of Hispanic/Latino descent.
- If you indicated in your account settings that you are predominantly of both Sub-Saharan African/African American and European descent, your result will be based on data from individuals of Sub-Saharan African/African American descent.
- If there is not enough data from individuals of your ethnicity or combination of ethnicities at this time, your result may be based on data from individuals of European descent because the most data is available for this population.
- Your Panic Attacks result also takes into account the birth sex you indicated in your account settings.

See our **white paper** to learn more about the science behind this report.

Read More:

Breslau N et al. (1999). "Smoking and panic attacks: an epidemiologic investigation." Arch Gen Psychiatry. 56(12):1141-7.[1]

Hibbert GA et al. (1989). "Respiratory control: its contribution to the treatment of panic attacks. A controlled study." Br J Psychiatry. 154:232-6.[2]

Kessler RC et al. (2006). "The epidemiology of panic attacks, panic disorder, and agoraphobia in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication." Arch Gen Psychiatry. 63(4):415-24.[3]

Mayo Clinic. "Panic attacks and panic disorder." Retrieved May 12, 2023, from https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/panic-attacks/symptoms-causes/syc-20376021.[4]

Meuret AE et al. (2010). "Respiratory and cognitive mediators of treatment change in panic disorder: evidence for intervention specificity." J Consult Clin Psychol. 78(5):691-704.[5]

NHS Inform. "How to deal with panic attacks." Retrieved May 12, 2023, from https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/anxiety-and-panic/how-to-deal-with-panic-attacks.[6]

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