

# **PATIENTS AS PARTNERS**

Brought to you by The South African Depression and Anxiety Group

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## **16% of South Africans will experience Anxiety and Panic**

***Two thirds will not seek help due to Stigma . .***

Panic Disorder is a very misunderstood illness and according to the SASH Study of 4351 adults conducted by Professor Dan Stein, in all parts of South Africa, two-thirds of the 15.8% of South Africans with the disorder will never seek help due to stigma and fear. (Prof Stein, UCT, SASH Study).

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. Whilst panic disorder typically occurs in adults between the ages of 20 – 40 years, it can also affect children and the elderly – and affects people of all races and socio-economic groups. 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 but can also occur “out of the blue”.

Symptoms of a panic attack include a racing heartbeat, difficulty breathing, feeling as though you 'can't get enough air', dizziness, light-headedness or nausea, trembling, sweating, shaking, chest pains, hot flashes, or sudden chills, tingling in fingers or toes, fear that you're going to go crazy or are about to die. The average length of a panic attack is 4 – 6 minutes, although they often feel a lot longer. Panic attacks can be so scary that people start avoiding situations in which they fear another attack. Untreated, Panic can have severe consequences - up to 30% of people with Panic Disorder abuse alcohol, 17% abuse drugs, and up to 20% attempt to commit suicide. It is interesting and important to note that caffeine, cold and flu medications, anti Malaria medications, appetite suppressants and local anaesthetics with adrenalin may trigger Panic attacks in some people. .

Most of us feel some amount of stress and anxiety in our lives which is normal, even helpful. But when the anxiety becomes overwhelming, persistent, or interferes with your daily activities, this may indicate a problem and it is advisable to talk to a doctor or psychologist. SADAG (The South African Depression and Anxiety Group) offers telephonic counselling 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm on 0800 20 50 26 or 011 262 6396, or visit their website [www.sadag.co.za](http://www.sadag.co.za).

Panic Disorder is highly treatable and for up to 90% of people, treatment is very effective. The aim of therapy is to help people live a full and productive life. Before receiving a diagnosis of panic, South Africans will on average visit eleven doctors and spend over R20 000 on medical investigations! The founder of SADAG Zane Wilson says, ““Before my diagnosis I was ill for ten years, virtually became housebound, couldn't drive, couldn't shop, couldn't stay on my own and spent thousands on trying to get a diagnosis. I was even giving lumbar punctures along with a host of tests “”. Eventually when I became suicidal and spoke to a psychiatrist the diagnosis of Panic disorder was made. I was put on medication, the first one did not work effectively but the second one did and I have now been panic free for 15 years” ” By starting SADAG my aim was to help people of all financial groups and particularly those without medical aids and in rural areas who struggle daily to get in a taxi or leave their home, or hold a job down”

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), medication, or a combination of the two is the recommended treatment for anxiety disorders. Treatments vary from person to person and depend on the type and severity of the disorder. Phone SADAG to find out what services and treatment options are available and right for you. The average length of CBT treatment is 10 - 12 weeks. Remember though that everybody is different and we all respond differently to different treatments and approaches. Recovery is possible with the proper professional care.

GPs, psychologists, and psychiatrists can diagnose and treat anxiety disorders. SADAG can refer you to a specialist in your area. You need to feel comfortable talking openly and honestly to your therapist or doctor. You can also go on to SADAG's website – [www.sadag.co.za](http://www.sadag.co.za) - to search for an anxiety disorders treatment specialist in your area. For anyone who suffers from Panic Disorder, or for loved ones, there will be a Panic Therapy workshop run by South African CBT and anxiety expert psychologist Dr Colinda Linde. The workshop, which is a steal at R50, will be held at the Morningside Clinic in Sandton during August from 9am until 12. The workshop is an incredible opportunity to hear Dr Linde explain the dynamics of a Panic attack, the concept and aims of CBT, self-help techniques that work, and to learn relaxation and breathing exercises to combat negative thinking and positively impact on Panic. This empowering workshop should not be missed. Later in the year, there will be workshops in Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria. For more information or to register for the workshop, please contact Chevonne at SADAG on 011 262 6396.

Panic Disorder is a terrifying illness that can cause great distress, isolation, and limits your life. Don't suffer in silence and alone. There is help. There is treatment. And there are people who understand. Contact SADAG. Remember that attacks always end. Always. Panic is not dangerous. Don't let panic win. “You can take control back of your life again.” Says Wilson.