



# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

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## Panic

Panic attacks, also known as anxiety attacks, are brief episodes of intense anxiety that triggers physical sensations of fear. Panic attacks are common, and most people will experience a panic attack at some point in their lives. Panic attacks can be uncomfortable, but they are not life threatening. A person who experiences panic attacks may choose to avoid a wide range of situations due to the fear of experiencing a panic attack, however, after understanding the characteristics that may come with them, you can gain confidence in your ability to cope.

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## What is panic?

It feels very scary when it happens - but a panic attack is when your body is faced with stressful situations. When a panic attack occurs, your body activates the flight or fight response. There are times where stressful situations may occur that can't be something that we can fight or run away from. This can leave feelings of panic to build up and without being released. Your body tends to be flooded with adrenaline that can trigger physiological changes.

Some people portray the experience of panic attacks as sheer terror. Panic attacks can be frightening, and you may feel a strong desire to escape the situation. But remember you are not alone. The emotional response to panic can include fear and anxiety. As a result, you may tend to avoid certain situations and sensations that evoke these feelings. **But remember panic sensations are not harmful.**

Panic attacks can peak quickly, ranging between a few minutes to half an hour, however the physical and emotional effects of an attack can last for a few hours. A panic attack is usually described as an event that "comes out of the blue", and can be synonymous with a specific situation, depending on the context and person. Panic attacks can be recurrent over time.

Psychological reactions that may occur during panic include catastrophic thoughts about normal or anxious physical sensations. Characteristics that may occur during a panic attack can include:

- ▶ Racing or pounding heart
- ▶ Sweating
- ▶ Trembling
- ▶ Difficulty breathing
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Choking sensations
- ▶ Hot flushes or chills
- ▶ Feelings of being detached

A person who experiences recurring and unexpected panic attacks and persistent fears of repeated attacks may be experiencing a panic disorder.

## Strategies to manage panic

There are many ways to make a huge difference for managing panic:

- ▶ Breathing retaining can slow your breathing and (breathe in for four seconds, hold for 2, exhale slowly for six seconds) can help decrease some physical cues that you might be sensitive to.
- ▶ Social support – find someone you can sit down and have a good talk.
- ▶ [Progressive muscle relaxation](#) can help reduce muscle tension.
- ▶ Focus on bodily sensations – notice normal changes in your physiological sensations that will lead to non-catastrophic thoughts and reduce your fear of them.
- ▶ Engage in regular light exercise – can help reduce anxiety and panic using up all the stress hormones your body produces when you worry. It also gives you a boost of ‘feel-good’ neurotransmitters that increase your confidence.
- ▶ Follow a healthy lifestyle – eating well, going out into nature, spending time with family and friends.
- ▶ Challenge yourself talk – how you think affects how you feel. Change how you perceive the situation, telling yourself “I will cope”, “I will get through this” can reduce panic and anxiety.

## Panic and my studies

Panic attacks and panic disorders can make it difficult to focus on your studies and all of which can make doing well at university harder. However, there are lots of strategies you can try to help support you in your studies, you just need to find the right ones that work for you.

- ▶ **Take breaks:** Allow yourself to take a break during studying to either go for a walk, acknowledge your feelings of panic, meditate, breathe, find a quiet place, and ground yourself.
- ▶ **One thing at a time:** Focus on one task at a time. It can be overwhelming to focus on multiple things at once – it is okay to take it slow.
- ▶ **Develop a positive self-talk habit:** The way you talk to yourself matters – avoid ‘self-talk’ that focuses your attention on your symptoms such as “Stop panicking!”, “Relax!”. Remind yourself that it can be uncomfortable and that you’ve felt these feelings before and you have been able to manage them.
- ▶ **Read positive affirmations:** Telling yourself of the positive attributes you have can be a strong reminder that you are in control of your feelings and that you are able to get through this
- ▶ **Notify Academic staff if you feel comfortable to do so:** Talking to Academic staff can allow them to understand the stresses you experience, and can assist in accommodating to your needs when discussing deadlines and exams.

## University Support

WSU resources:

If panic disorder and/or panic attacks are creating barriers that may affect your study or you want support to optimise your study then the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

▶ **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email [counselling@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:counselling@westernsydney.edu.au)

▶ **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email [disability@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:disability@westernsydney.edu.au) or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

▶ **WSU [Student Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

▶ **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email [d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au).

▶ **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

▶ **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

▶ **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

▶ **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

▶ **Leave of Absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

## Community Support

### Community resources

▶ [Lifeline](#) (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14**

Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).

- ▶ **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

[Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#) - 1800 011 511

This Mental Health Line is staffed by mental health professionals that can help and provide you advice about your needs and discuss referrals to local mental health services. It is available to everyone in NSW and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

- ▶ Visit this [article](#) from Confident Life for quick grounding techniques to help when you experience feelings of panic
- ▶ [Reach Out](#) is great anonymous platform if you have something on your mind and want to talk to someone.
- ▶ [This Way Up](#) is an anxiety clinic at St Vincent's Hospital. They offer a free online course for students focusing on wellbeing
- ▶ [ABC Everyday](#) has information and strategies about panic attacks and how to support someone through it
- ▶ [Beyond Blue](#) is a 24/7 service that provides information and support to everyone. You can call them on 1300 22 4636 or chat online.
- ▶ [Centre for Clinical Interventions](#) has a panic workbook, which helps you to understand what panic is and how panic happens
- ▶ Take a look at [The ABC'S of Thinking and Feeling](#) that can help you use a thought diary to monitor the unhelpful thoughts that can lead to how you feel about a particular situation.

## Resources

- ▶ [Podcasts](#)
- ▶ [Videos](#)
- ▶ [Apps](#)

### Podcasts

#### **“Real Time Rescue for a Panic Attack”**

In this episode, panic attacks are discussed, along with breathing exercises that can help manage the feelings of fear and anxiety.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/real-time-rescue-for-a-panic-attack/id1449728710?i=1000428749171>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1J58282pS9ToFZrtQMSD7w>

## **“Episode 5: Panic Attacks – What You Need to Know and What You Can Do**

Psychotherapist Joshua speaks deeply about panic attacks and tools that we can use to help recognise the fear that comes with panic attacks. Trigger warning: moment-to-moment sensations of a panic attack are described during this episode.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/episode-5-panic-attacks-what-you-need-to-know-and/id1489050218?i=1000464273171>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/6klQyn9SZWh2FnxdU80QA7?si=df18e44ced3d4998>

### Videos

#### **What is a panic attack?**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16XD6zP\\_d8M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16XD6zP_d8M)

#### **What causes panic attacks, and how can we prevent them? - Cindy J. Aaronson**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzFObkVRSV0>

### Apps

- ▶ There is a 24/7 support app called [TalkCampus](#), which is free and available to download. WSU students can connect and talk with other students about anything.
  - ( [iOS](#) / [Android](#) )
- ▶ [Smiling Mind](#) can be used to boost mental wellbeing. It is free to download.
  - ( [iOS](#) / [Android](#) )
- ▶ **My Compass** is a free online tool that is available to download. It is a self-help program developed by the Black Dog Institute. It has assisted in relieving symptoms in people experiencing mild-to-moderate anxiety and depression.
  - ( [Website](#) )
- ▶ **Headgear** is a free and easy-to-use smartphone app that is designed to build resilience and wellbeing and prevent anxiety and depression.
  - ( [iOS](#) / [Android](#) )
- ▶ **iBreathe** is free access and is available on all iOS devices (App store) and can be installed on your apple watch and iMessage to send to your friends. iBreathe helps you guide through deep breathing exercises and is simple and easy-to-use
  - ( [iOS](#) )

## Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional. Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

**Please find the attached PDF document [here](#).**

## References:

[Western Sydney University- Disruption to Studies Policy](#)  
[Western Sydney University- Withdrawing without academic penalty](#)  
[Western Sydney University- Counselling Service](#)  
[Western Sydney University- Student Welfare Service](#)  
[Western Sydney University- WesternNow](#)  
[Western Sydney University- Chaplaincy](#)  
[Western Sydney University- TalkCampus](#)



[Beyond Blue- Online chat](#)

[Better Health Victoria – Panic Attack](#)

[CCI – Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)

[NHS – Panic Disorder](#)