Anxiety and Panic Attacks

Your caregiver has informed you that you are having an anxiety or panic attack. There may be many forms of this. Most of the time these attacks come suddenly and without warning. They come at any time of day, including periods of sleep, and at any time of life. They are may be strong and unexplained. Sometimes we do not know what is producing our anxiety and it gets out of control. It is usually this anxiety that brings us to the emergency room with hyperventilation syndrome, panic attack, or a sudden attack of anxiety.

Anxiety is a protective mechanism of the body in its fight or flight mechanism. In modern society most of these danger situations we perceive are actually nonphysical. Anxiety over losing a job for example may be protective in that it gives an added push to search for a new job.

It is not difficult for a person to recognize when they are having a panic attack. Some of the most common feelings are:

- Intense terror
- Dizziness, feeling faint
- Hot and cold flashes
- Fear of going crazy
- Feelings that nothing is real
- Sweating, trembling
- Chest pain and *palpitations* (irregular heart)
- Shaking
- Smothering, choking *sensations* (feelings)
- Feelings of impending doom and that death is near
- Tingling of *extremities* (arms/hands and legs/feet), this may be from over breathing

All of these most common *symptoms* (problems) and can combine to make up panic attacks. Few things trigger as much fear as this symptom complex (collection of problems) does.

These attacks have many names with slight differences. For example: obsessive-compulsive disorders where repeating the compulsion again removes the anxiety temporarily; post traumatic stress disorders where a previous trauma causes the repeat bouts of anxiety; phobias or fear associated with objects, situations etc.; generalized anxiety disorders.

Today you may have been given an anti-anxiety agent. This may make you drowsy, but will remove the feelings of panic and anxiety. If these symptoms return, see your caregiver or return to this location.

Other treatments that may help are therapy and exercise. If you know the cause of your anxiety, removal or avoidance of that cause will help.

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