

Patient information from BMJ

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Self-help for panic disorder

What is it?

Self-help for panic disorder can take many different forms.

- Some self-help programmes are available on the **internet**. You work through different modules online. For example, you may learn about the symptoms of panic attacks and why they happen.

There might also be modules on breathing exercises, relaxation, and cognitive restructuring. In cognitive restructuring, you're asked to think about assumptions you make and decide whether these are realistic.

For example, if you're worried about going out of the house because you fear that something terrible will happen, you'll be asked to think about how likely this is. You might get emails from a therapist to check how you are getting on and to answer any questions you might have.

- Another self-help programme might involve working through books, CDs, and DVDs at home. These would most likely cover the same sorts of things that a programme on the internet would.
- Alternatively, you might see a therapist, either on your own or in a group. The therapist would give you exercises and information to work through at home. But you would still have contact with a therapist from time to time. This might be over the telephone or in person.

With all of these methods you should still have some contact with a health professional. This might be a doctor, a psychologist, or a therapist. But how often you see them will vary according to your treatment.

How can it help?

Studies suggest that self-help can work well for people with panic disorder. Your symptoms of panic may get better and you may have fewer panic attacks. You may also feel less anxious and depressed.

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But you need to be prepared to work on your own for self-help to work. If your symptoms are very distressing, you might find this difficult.

If you have agoraphobia, this can also get better with self-help techniques. (People with agoraphobia are extremely anxious about situations that they may not be able to get out of, or places that they cannot run away from.)

How does it work?

Self-help teaches you about why you get panic attacks and gives you the skills to manage your panic symptoms so that they don't happen at all, or they are less severe or frequent.

For example, you might learn about how the way you think affects the way you feel. By changing the way you think about life, you may feel less anxious. This may help prevent panic attacks and help you get on with your life.

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