



**Anxiety & Panic Attacks  
Causes and Treatment**

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## **Characterization of Panic Attack and Panic Disorder**

Mandy, a mother who had recently experienced a difficult childbirth was doing routine grocery shopping when she suddenly felt an inexplicable sense of impending dread. She could not breathe and her heart raced so much she thought it would explode. Her legs could barely support her, and she had the intense desire to run out of the store and scream for help. She had no idea of what was happening to her, except that she felt like she was going to die. After managing to toss some cash at the counter, she fled from the store and got into her car where she gradually settled down. She drove back home slowly, and by the time she parked the car in the garage, she felt normal again. After a few days, she forgot about her ordeal.

However, a week later, she suddenly felt the same feelings of overwhelming dread inside her car while waiting for the traffic to move. She was so distraught she had to pull over to the side of the road, and call a friend through her cell phone to come and get her.<sup>1</sup>

Mandy's experience is a classic example of a panic attack. Panic attacks are characterized by extremely intense symptoms of anxiety such as accelerated heart rate, palpitations or pounding heart, trembling or shaking, sweating, shortness of breath, and fear of dying. It may also include feelings of choking, chest pain or discomfort, nausea or abdominal distress, feelings of light-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mental-health.families.com/blog/panic-disorder-case-studies-2>