

Side Effects of Panic

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Without treatment, panic disorder can have very serious consequences.

The immediate danger with panic disorder is that it can often lead to a phobia. That's because once you've suffered a panic attack, you may start to avoid situations like the one you were in when the attack occurred.

Many people with panic disorder show 'situational avoidance' associated with their panic attacks. For example, you might have an attack while driving, and start to avoid driving until you develop an actual phobia towards it. In worst case scenarios, people with panic disorder develop agoraphobia -- fear of going outdoors -- because they believe that by staying inside, they can avoid all situations that might provoke an attack, or where they might not be able to get help. The fear of an attack is so debilitating, they prefer to spend their lives locked inside their homes.

Even if you don't develop these extreme phobias, your quality of life can be severely damaged by untreated panic disorder. A recent study showed that people who suffer from panic disorder:

- are more prone to alcohol and other drug abuse
- have greater risk of attempting suicide
- spend more time in hospital emergency rooms
- spend less time on hobbies, sports and other satisfying activities
- tend to be financially dependent on others
- report feeling emotionally and physically less healthy than non-sufferers.
- are afraid of driving more than a few miles away from home

Panic disorders can also have economic effects. For example, a recent study cited the case of a woman who gave up a \$40,000 a year job that required travel for one close to home that only paid \$14,000 a year. Other sufferers have reported losing their jobs and having to rely on public assistance or family members.

None of this needs to happen. Panic disorder can be treated successfully, and sufferers can go on to lead full and satisfying lives.