



Panic Disorder

When Fear of Impending Doom
Drives the Need to Self-Medicate

What is Panic Disorder?

Panic Disorder is an anxiety condition marked by sudden, intense episodes of overwhelming fear accompanied by physical symptoms like racing heart, chest tightness, and shortness of breath. These attacks strike without warning, creating a cycle of dread and avoidance that controls daily life. grasp the consequences of substance use.

What Does It Look Like?

- > **Unexpected Panic Attacks**
Sudden waves of terror with no clear cause, often mistaken for a medical emergency.
- > **Anticipatory Anxiety**
Constant dread of the next attack, which controls where they go and what they do.
- > **Physical Symptoms Without Explanation**
Racing heart, dizziness, and chest pain that doctors can't find a medical cause for.
- > **Avoidance Behavior**
Refusing to go places or do things where a panic attack has happened before.

How Does Panic Disorder Contribute to Relapse?

For someone with panic disorder, substances become one way to shut down the overwhelming physical terror that can strike at any moment.

- 1) **Substances Quiet the Fear Response**
Alcohol and sedatives offer immediate relief from panic that nothing else provides.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Can't Rewire the Anxiety**
Panic disorder requires sustained therapeutic work that 30 days can't accomplish.
- 3) **Untreated Panic Sends Them Back to What Worked**
Without new tools to manage attacks, they return to the one thing that stopped the fear.

Prevalence:

~6 million U.S. adults affected
(2.7%)¹population¹

Co-Occurrence:

~20% develop alcohol or
substance abuse in their lifetime²

Relapse Risk:

3-6x increased odds of substance
dependence³

Sources: ¹ NIMH, *Panic Disorder Statistics* ² Sansone et al., *Panic Disorder, Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Primary Care Companion J Clin Psychiatry* (2004) ³ Smith & Book, *Anxiety and Substance Use Disorders: A Review, Psychiatric Times* (2010)

Long-Term Treatment for Panic Disorder and Addiction

Panic disorder rewires the brain's threat response, and substances become the only reliable off-switch. A 30-day program can teach coping skills on paper, but it takes months of real-world practice to build new responses to panic that actually hold under pressure.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** gives clients the extended time to confront panic without relying on substances. Clients advance when they demonstrate genuine changes in how they respond to fear and manage anxiety in daily life.



“Panic disorder convinces people their body is failing them. Substances are the way they’ve learned to make that feeling stop. We have to teach the nervous system a new response, and that kind of rewiring takes time.”



 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch

Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Panic Disorder

When panic disorder goes untreated, substances remain the default response to overwhelming fear. Without addressing both conditions together, every panic attack becomes a relapse risk.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**
Untreated panic keeps substances as the only reliable relief.
- **Rebuilding the Fear Response**
New coping skills must replace the chemical off-switch for panic.
- **Providing Enough Time for Real Change**
Years of conditioned fear responses can't be undone in weeks.

Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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