



Study: Panic Attacks are Linked to Poor Outcomes for Diabetic Patients

There is a strong link between panic episodes and increased complications from diabetes, according to a study conducted at Group Health Cooperative, a Seattle-based nonprofit health care system that coordinates care and coverage. The work appeared in the November issue of *General Hospital Psychiatry*.

The researchers surveyed patients with diabetes about their symptoms, disability, social and emotional function, and quality of life. They also collected data on the patients' blood sugar levels, diabetic complications, and other illnesses.

The team had previously reported a strong link between diabetes and depression, which often goes along with panic disorders. They were interested in examining panic independently, however, to see whether patients who have panic without depression would also have poor diabetic outcomes.

"Panic attacks can mimic episodes of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), so we need a better understanding of how the two conditions are related," explained Evette Ludman, PhD, lead author of the article and a research associate at Group Health. "We don't want people adjusting their blood sugar thinking they are having hypoglycemia when their symptoms are actually caused by a panic disorder."

Of the 4,385 patients surveyed, 193 reported experiencing recent episodes of panic or fear that caused them to change their immediate behavior. After accounting for the effect of depression, panic episodes were associated with higher blood sugar levels, increased diabetic complications and symptoms, greater disability, and lower self-rated health and functioning.

About half of the patients with panic also reported having major depression. By contrast, only 10 percent of patients without panic episodes had major depression.

Panic episodes may be a consequence of the diabetes itself, the researchers explain. Also, panic may interfere with patients' self-care and ability to follow their treatment plans.

If you have diabetes and you know that anxiety is an issue for you, you should talk to your doctor about possible treatment for your anxiety," advised Ludman. And doctors should carefully assess their patients with diabetes, looking for signs of depression or panic disorders, she added.

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Source: Group Health Cooperative Center for Health Studies

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