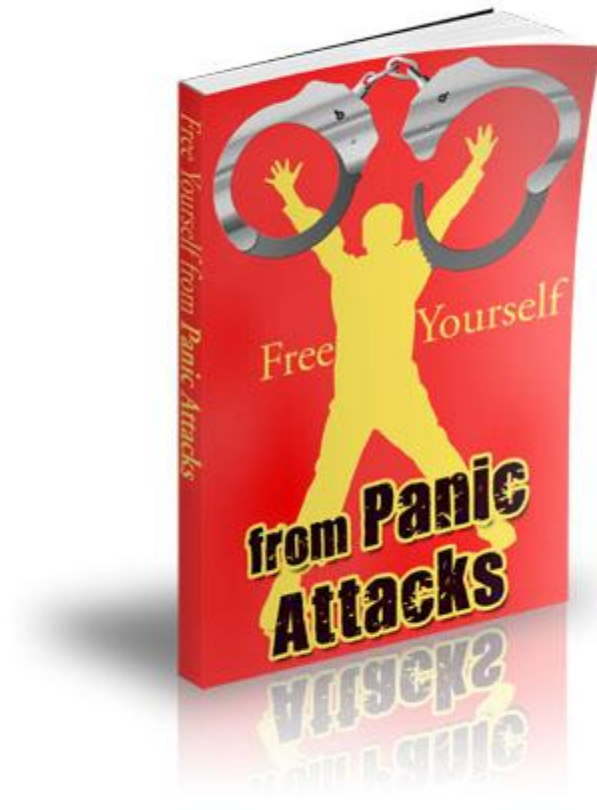


# Free Yourself from Panic Attacks



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# Free Yourself

With all the stresses and strains of modern living, panic attacks are become a common problem for many people. Panic attacks occur when the pressure we are living under starts to creep up and overwhelm us. Often it's a result of running on the treadmill of life and forgetting to watch the signs and symptoms of the effects of excessive stress on our bodies.

Thankfully panic attacks are very treatable. Often it is just a matter of learning to recognize the symptoms and learn simple but effective techniques that help you release yourself from the crippling effects a panic attack can bring.

If you've every experienced a panic attack you know how it feels. It can come on very suddenly and is incredibly intense. You feel anxious or fearful and your heart pounds. Many people suffering from a panic attack will feel like their heart is giving out and may be fearful that they are going to die.

Though it feels like it lasts forever, panic attacks only normally last between five and twenty minutes. While many people will have one or two in their life time, if they are occurring on a regular basis and begin to impede the day to day rhythm of your life, you may in fact have a panic disorder.

It is more common for women than men to suffer from reported panic attacks. However due to the fact many panic attacks can be misdiagnosed as heart problems which men tend to report more than women, it is possible the statistics are unofficially a lot closer together.

Left untreated, regular panic attacks can cripple you and prevent you from carrying out your everyday activities. However thankfully panic attacks are very treatable and you don't need to suffer under them forever.

So let's start by taking a look at the physical signs ...

# What Are the Physical Signs?

If you've ever wondered the power of our minds over our bodies, then a panic attack is an excellent illustration of how powerful our thinking is over the mechanics of our bodies.

There are a range of physical symptoms our mind can generate around our bodies. As everyone is different, you may not experience all of these to experience a full panic attack. However if you experience several of these together, it is likely you are having a panic attack

\*A feeling of lightheadness or dizziness. This is often at the beginning of the attack. You can feel a little like you've had a few glasses too much to drink, or a sense the room is shifting a little around you. There maybe a rushing sound in your ears, as the blood moves away from your brain, causing you to feel like you may faint.

\* Difficulty in breathing. Your throat feels as if it has a large lump in it, and it hurts to swallow. Your chest tightens and constricts and it's difficult to take deep slow breaths. It feels a little like you've just been sprinting for a few kilometers and you need to catch your breath.

\* Your heart rate increases. Your pulse becomes faster and fluttery and sometimes a little uneven. Your heart is thumping against your chest and you are unable to slow it even if you are sitting still.

\* Hot flushes. Your face feels flushed and it feels almost as if you have a high temperature. You can also feel nauseous, as if you are trying to fight off an infection

\* Waves of anxiety. The anxious feelings rise and fall through the attack as you struggle to regain control. As each wave comes it becomes a little more intense.

\* Unable to stop unwanted thinking. The inability to keep control of your thinking, struggling to manage where your thoughts go. Your thoughts may skip from normal every day concern to imagined fears, fantasizing the very worst outcome of whatever you are battling. It can run as a loop inside your mind, repeating the very thoughts you least enjoy.

\* Feeling disconnected from reality. You're unable to place the way you feel with what is actually happening. Often part of you can know what you are thinking isn't correct, and it's too much, but you still can't stop. It's like there is two of you inside your mind, one stable and sensible and the other losing it- and the sensible one can't shout the panicking side down.

\* Feeling out of control. Panic attacks are in the main a loss of control. From your physical manifestation of panic to your thoughts, you lose the ability to manage the way you think and act. The problem is that much of the effect is internal so while you may be deathly panicked inside, with your heart racing and your mind going all over the place, your physical body can remain completely still. It's like panic is running a marathon inside your body, and you can't work out how it can escape.

Many people confuse the sense of panic with having a heart attack. The sensation can feel almost the same. Due to this it is a very good idea to seek out professional attention to ensure there is not a physical reason for your attack.



# What Are the Symptoms

Researchers are still unsure what causes panic attacks. However if other family members have suffered from them, there is a stronger likelihood that you too may do so. Stress of course can also play a large factor with panic attacks often first appearing at times of great change such as getting married, having a child, moving homes, financial stress or changing career. Sudden changes that are out of your control such as the death of someone close to you, a marriage breakup or redundancy can also trigger a panic attack, particularly if there were additional stressors ongoing at the same time.

If you have a close relative who is bipolar or suffers from depression that can also increase your chances of suffering from a panic attack.

However there are several physical ailments and conditions that can also share the same physical feelings as a panic attack. It is a very good idea to check these things are not causing your panicked feelings.

- Mitral valve prolapse. This is when one of the heart valves does not close off properly. It is not a major condition but should be diagnosed and treated to prevent further complications.
- Tachycardia. You may experience a raised heart rate due to a tachycardia attack. This may be a symptom of another heart related syndrome and your doctor will probably suggest an ECG to check for any irregularities.

- **Hyperthyroidism.** This is also often accompanied with a loss of appetite and weight loss. This can be checked with a simple blood test and is treatable. Hyperthyroidism is caused by an over active thyroid.
- **Hypoglycemia.** A very low blood sugar count can send your body into overdrive as it tries to protect the brain and keeps it functioning. This can also be a precursor to diabetes. A test of your glucose tolerance can help earmark whether this could be an issue for you.
- **Overuse of stimulants.** Anything that artificially increases the heart rate such as too many coffees and energy drinks, illegal drugs such as cocaine, or the use of amphetamines can cause you to display some of the same characteristics.
- **Adjusting to a change of medication.** If you've been on a course of medication for a length of time and then taken yourself off it, sometimes there can be a physical reaction as your brain adjusts to the different chemicals in your body. If you are on a medication long term, consult your doctor before coming off it as they may have some suggestions on how to provide your body with the best way to have little to no reaction to the change.
- **Running on empty.** If you live in a constant state of flux, with high stress levels you may be suffering from adrenal failure which can trigger panic attacks. Adrenal failure is a growing problem in today's busy life and can lead to hyperthyroidism and other complications if not treated.
- **Depression can bring on panic attacks.** It's important to look at the whole range of feelings and symptoms you are dealing with. While it is possible to alter your behavior, and learn

simple methods to cope, it is equally as important to ensure you receive the correct medication to help you while you learn these methods if necessary.

# What Causes a Panic Attack?

Besides the situations reasons mentioned above, researchers are unsure about the exact reason for panic attacks. In many ways it's just our bodies designed to do what they should, but in our modern world our bodies do not have the same required need to run out or stress, being chased by a saber toothed tiger who wants his dinner.

Our natural defense system against stress is our flight and fight response which is one of our most basic and primitive action and also one of our most powerful. It's meant to be powerful as it's meant to protect us from moving buses, falling trees and anything else that may come between us and life. This flight of fight response speeds up your heart, pumping adrenaline into your blood to get you ready to run for your life. Our poor bodies have not evolved as fast as our world, so while our brain is telling us to run, our bodies stall nice and still, or sitting quietly somewhere.

The fight or flight response is meant to help you either stand and cope with the danger, or run away from it. It's normal and it's natural. What makes a panic attack difference is there is no danger- it's just the expectation or preemptive possibility of danger that's triggering it.

While some panic attacks can be attributed to a family history of panic attacks, or to a psychological disorder, they can also occur with no clear reason.

# Stress Can Trigger a Panic Attacks

People who live stressful, high powered lives are more likely than others to suffer from panic attacks. As the stress in our lives becomes more intense the pressure increases. It's a little like one of those whistling kettles that explode with steam and noise once they get to the right temperature. The pressure builds and builds until there is no where for it to go but course through your body. The more stress you place on your body and mind every day, the closer you are at all times to that boiling point.

Our brain is very clever. It is constantly checking and rechecking to make sure we have all the reactions and chemicals we need to live our lives. It is always ready to kick start our flight or fight response, ready to protect us against whatever s our enemy. It can't tell the difference between a real saber toothed tiger and a metaphorical one, but to all intents and purposes, the tiger is just as dangerous and we need protecting from it. The panic attack is merely our body trying to look after us they way our bodies have been caring for us since we first experienced stress.

Just because our brain thinks its life threatening doesn't mean that it is. It just means our most primitive part of our body, the part that works completely on instinct rather than logic or reason has decided we need a bit of a kick start. This can be either because we're living on a constant rollercoaster of stress or because something in our environment has reminded us of something we associate with danger and the need for a flight or fight reaction.

If you've ever brushed past a car alarm, barely touching it and it's gone off you'll know how easy it can be to set off something incredibly sensitive. Our flight or fight response can be like that too. We can become so sensitive that it starts up at the smallest

incident and it's difficult to stop it once its screams of protest against danger have begun.

The solution is simple. If we go back to our whistling kettle, the simplest way to stop it boiling, letting all that steam and noise go is to turn down the heat. Our panic attacks can be managed or prevented in the same way. All we need to do is turn down the heat. Even if the day to day stress remains, we can learn to manage it at a simmering boil, rather than at a fast and furious froth of bubbles and heat.

# Removing the Panic Attack Worries

Attacks can feel like a very private terror. On the outside you can look like everything is perfectly fine, while your insides feel like they are going to explode. Many people suffering from panic attacks can feel they are isolated and set apart from others for having the attacks. However the problem is reasonably common and widespread. Many people have suffered from them, and large numbers of those have found methods to reduce or remove panic attacks entirely.

There are some common beliefs about panic attacks that sufferers hold. Perhaps you have experienced some of these yourself.

1. It's going to make your heart give out, and you'll die.  
Regardless of how hard your heart is pounding in your chest, it's far stronger than you give it credit for. It's the strongest muscle in our bodies and it's designed to be able to take a rapid increase- just as it would if you were running a marathon or doing a funky dance class. If you do have an existing heart condition it is perhaps best to get it checked just for piece of mind, but for the vast majority our hearts will be completely fine during and after an attack.
1. You won't get enough air to your lungs. Many people find it hard to breathe well during a panic attack. However you are actually taking in more air than you feel like you are. The tightness and then accompanying lightness of breath is caused by hyperventilation, with your breaths causing an excess of oxygen to move through your body.
2. You may faint. You won't faint because your body is trying to protect you from danger. If it was a physical threat your

body would want to keep you upright and moving very fast away from danger. Even if your danger isn't a physical one, your body is actually increasing your consciousness and you are incredibly awake. If worst comes to worst and you did faint, think of the benefits. At least you'd have some rest from the thumping in your chest if you did faint. The sense that you might faint comes from the hyperventilation. Even though you feel weak and as if you may faint, your large muscles are soaking in oxygen and are pumped and ready for action.

3. You feel as if you may be having a stroke. Because your body is feeling a wide range of sensations you may try to work out what is causing it. However all the physical sensations are not from a deeper issue such as a stroke. Your body isn't about to self destruct. It's just doing a very natural thing in a time of extreme stress.
4. You are going crazy. Because you don't feel like you are in control the whole experience can feel like you are unbalanced or losing your mind. However all that is happening is your body is reacting to the need to escape whatever situation you've found yourself in. That is a very sane solution to your needs.
5. You are worried you are going to embarrass yourself. Panic attacks are very personal things. What sets one person off is different to what would set off another person. Remember that while you feel like everyone can see how you are feeling; most of what you are experiencing isn't noticeable to anyone else. Most panic attacks last less than ten minutes, and certainly no longer than twenty. It will pass, and once it's gone things quickly come back to normal again.



6. You're completely out of control. Actually you are still in control- just a different part of your brain is organizing your body. Your body is allowing your subconscious mind to take over so that your conscious mind stops second guessing it. Your body is still being taken care of, just by a different part of your brain.

Remembering the panic attack will pass is perhaps the first step in conquering the attacks and learning how to manage them.

# When it's Agoraphobia

Left untreated panic attacks occurring on a regular basis can develop into agoraphobia. It's one of the reasons why it's good to seek treatment as early as possible.

Agoraphobia kicks in when a person suffering for panic attacks starts to worry about having one in a public place where they are unable to hide the effects of it from others. It may be a place they can not easily escape from, or where people may easily notice them. Approximately thirty percent of panic attack sufferers develop agoraphobia.

Are you at risk of developing agoraphobia? If you have experienced some of the following symptoms, it is advisable to go have a chat to your doctor about whether agoraphobia is a potential problem for you.

Agoraphobics are afraid of the following:

- \*Being in an open place. You feel exposed and vulnerable when you don't have clearly defined physical boundaries
- \* Entering public places, go shopping or be part of a crowd. It can almost feel the adverse of agoraphobic with a sense that everything is closing in and feeling stifling. Escape is the only thing you want.
- \*Traveling in planes, busses and trains where you are part of the crowd.
- \*Being in a lift or on a bridge. Anything that can not be escaped from easily.

\*A café, movie theatre or restaurant that you can not walk out of whenever you want to.

\*Any location that is unfamiliar and different. Many agoraphobics become virtual recluses, preferring to stay at home where everything is more easily controlled.

People who suffer from panic attacks can also develop other phobias or OCD. These fears are developed when your mind naturally wants to avoid those foods or types of exercise or behaviors that you feel may be setting your panic attacks off. This in turn creates a greater likelihood of fresh panic attacks if you are placed in front of these stimuli.

# Foods That Can Make You Panic

If you have a sensitivity to a particular type of food, eating it can increase your likelihood of having a panic attack. There are a few types of foods that can trigger an attack but in particular there are three chief ones that can affect your ability to keep that panic in check.

The top three anxiety producing foods are sugar, alcohol and caffeine. These three don't cause the panic attack, but they can increase your general state of anxiety which can compound the problem.

## **Sugar**

Many people today use sugar as their emergency pick me up food. This creates a huge wave of mood changes as you move from a low sugar state to a high one and then come crashing back down again. The craving for sugary foods or high carbs such as doughnuts and cakes often indicates a sugar addiction problem. Eating sugar can cause lactic acid to build up in your bloodstream. High levels of this can bring on a panicky state of mind.

Sugary food needs insulin to counteract it in the bloodstream. The body releases large amounts of insulin that reduces the amount of sugar in your blood. This can cause an agitated state of mind and your mood can swing as the sugar rises and falls. If you have a tendency to suffer from panic attacks, it is a good idea to go on a low GI or low sugar diet. As refined carbohydrates also convert to sugar fast it is best to stick to natural foods with plenty of whole grains, vegetables and good protein.

## **Alcohol**

Alcohol is both a stimulant and an exaggerant. Whatever your state of mind, alcohol will help you get there bigger and faster. Drinking alcohol also increases the lactic acid in your body, and causes your blood sugar levels to exaggerate. It also prevents you from being able to make reasoned decisions or see things calmly and dispassionately.

## **Caffeine**

Caffeine may make you feel like you are getting started in the morning, but it can be wrecking havoc with your with your ability to handle stress and your levels of panicky feelings. Caffeine can block the protein adenosine which regulates the firing of neurons in the brain. This protein is the one that causes you to feel drowsy. Caffeine affects its ability to kick start the process, increasing the firing of the neurons. This makes your body produce adrenaline because your body thinks an emergency is close by. The adrenaline increase can cause your heart rate to increase, and increases your body's state of emergency. This can be enough to make you feel anxious.

Caffeine also increases the lactic acid build up in your body. If you think you are drinking too much caffeine from both coffee and from carbonated caffeine drinks such as energy drinks and cola, then slowly reduce the amount you are drinking to remove the problem. Watch your caffeine intake from all sorts of sources- green tea, which has good health benefits, also has a high amount of caffeine.

# Will I Need Medication?

If your panic attacks are happening frequently enough to impede your everyday life, it's important you do seek professional help. While many self help techniques can free you from the bindings of panic attacks, it is important you receive all the help you can to prevent it from taking over your life.

No matter what you are advised to take or do, remember you are still the one in charge. Weigh up the pros and cons of each treatment and consider if it is something you think will work for you. Many people find a multi faceted approach to solving their panic attacks works best- using a range of solutions to keep it all in check.

## **Antidepressants.**

Most doctors will advise someone suffering from regular panic attacks to go on antidepressants. These help around fifty to sixty percent of sufferers. While these were developed for depression, being prescribed them doesn't mean your doctor thinks you are depressed- they just have been found to also work with people suffering from panic attacks.

Antidepressants work by working with your serotonin levels in the brain which has been found to relate to your feelings of panic. It is not a quick fix solution, with the antidepressants taking two to four weeks to kick in and work. Many people will stop taking them after the first week as they feel they aren't working.

There are a range of different antidepressants available and it can be a bit of a process to discover which one meets your needs best. All of them do have side effects and it is up to you to consider whether these are worth experiencing as you take the drug. The most common type prescribed for panic attacks is SSRI

antidepressants as these have been devised explicitly to affect serotonin levels. Some people have also reported that the panic symptoms become worse after the first few days of taking the drug, before calming down again.

If you have been diagnosed with a panic disorder, it is expected you will need to take an antidepressant for at least a year. Weaning yourself off them is a slow process and needs to be done under the close supervision of a doctor to ensure you do not damage the progress you have made by going off them too fast. Around half of the people who wean themselves off revert back to having panic attacks again. For these people, taking the drug long term is the preferred option.

If you have had cognitive behavior therapy during your time on antidepressants you are less likely to return to having panic attacks once you stop the medication.

### **Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)**

If you want to seek treatment that involves talking and counseling this has been found to be a successful route for around half of people who suffer from panic attacks or agoraphobia.

This type of therapy works because it attempts to both help you process why you may be having the thoughts you have leading up to a panic attack and then help you change your behaviors to help you manage them with your state feeling one build up.

Cognitive therapy is based around the idea that the way we think triggers panic attacks. Any harmful or unbeneficial thinking patterns are worked through and identified along with false beliefs or thoughts you may have (such as everyone thinks you are useless, or you may get trapped in a room if you enter it.) Many of these thoughts can run in a loop before a panic attack so identifying and then dealing with them can sometimes be enough

to prevent another attack, or at least reduce it's effectiveness at controlling you.

Behavior therapy provides you with tools to help you avoid the avoidance issues often accompanying panic disorders. The therapist will help you to walk through those scenarios that trigger an attack and help you feel more confident and in control, reducing the prevalence's of a panic attack in these situations. This may include the use of mantras or breathing techniques.

If you don't like to use any form of drug, this method can be a powerful solution. However it is important to find an experienced therapist who has experience in panic disorders, and be prepared for a long haul of therapy. It won't be solved in one or two sessions especially if the panic disorder is a well established part of your everyday life.

A combination of antidepressants and therapy is often sought after.



# Help Yourself and Lose the Panic

If you want to help yourself to reduce the problem of panic attacks you can. In fact starting the process yourself can make you feel more in control as you are starting the journey of your own accord, and this can instill a sense of self pride.

Professional help and medication do help, but there are things you can do yourself to reduce the problem.

## **Google is Your Friend.**

You've started the process with this report; now continue by using Google and books to find out everything you can about panic. Read all the information you can get your hands on about panic disorders, what the brain is doing when you are panicking, about anxiety and how the flight or fight response causes a biological reaction that induces the panic attack. Knowing it's something caused by a very natural chemical process can help you stop feeling like there is something wrong with you that is unfixable or strange.

## **Reduce Your use of Stimulants**

We've talked about the impact of alcohol, caffeine and sugar on people who suffer panic attacks. Smoking is also known to trigger the symptoms of a panic attack as it narrows the blood flow and increases your levels of adrenaline. Avoiding these things will stop them from affecting the existing chemical balance in your mind. It is a good idea to check if any medications you are prescribed contain stimulants. Even cold and flu medication can often contain large amounts of stimulants that will kick start a panic attack, as do some diet pills.

## **Yoga - Your Way Out**

Yoga, tai chi and Pilates not only help you shape and define your body, but make you focus on relaxing and your general body awareness. Meditation and massage also help relax the muscles and reduce the tension we can so easily build up before a panic attack. Add some sort of relaxation into your day every day. Make it part of your every day process. At the very least your body will thank you for it.

## **Breathe-in, Breathe-out.**

Learning some good breathing techniques helps you to reduce that light headed feeling that hyperventilation brings. A lightheaded feeling and a tight sensation in the chest are often the worst parts of a panic attack as you feel your heart is going to give out or you are going to faint. Deep, slow breathing can reduce the sensations of panic in your body. It can also help you to focus on your breath instead of the thoughts spiraling out of control in your mind. It helps you ride the waves of panic and feel in control of it, and you can eventually stop the cycle from reaching that unbearable stage.

# Getting Your Breathing Under Control

Getting your breathing under control is the key to gaining control during a panic attack. Over breathing, or hyperventilation makes the intensity of the panic attack worse. It is both a symptom and a cause of the panic attack so it's important to address it.

Many people who suffer from panic attacks tend to over breathe even when they are not experiencing a panic attack.

“I discovered a simple solution to my panic attacks was to focus on my breath, breathing in deeply and slowly then pushing my breath out consciously on the exhale. I would repeat a phrase over and over again to focus my breath which I made up, but discovered was also an ancient Buddhist saying that was developed for meditation. I would think “breathe in love” on the inhale, and “breathe out fear” on the exhale. It would stop the panic attack from taking root and I learnt to use it the first hint of time I started to move into that cycle.”

## **Emma Chilster (34)**

It is important to first realize that hyperventilating is just giving you too much oxygen. Because you are putting it into your body so fast, your body doesn't have enough carbon dioxide to counteract it. Because of this the body can't use all the oxygen which makes you feel short of air.

If during a panic attack you feel light headed, dizzy and giddy, short of breath and numb in your extremities with a tight chest and a thumping heart, then you are hyperventilating. You may also have clammy hands, a dry mouth and feel as if you are breaking

into a sweat. You could be shivering and feel weak all over. You may want to sit down.

Breathing evenly and regularly will dissipate the problem. There are several easy methods to help you do this.

1. Find a paper bag and breathe in and out into it. This means you get a bigger dose of carbon dioxide to compensate for the excess oxygen
2. Stop breathing. Or rather hold onto the last breath you took and let the oxygen in your body move to the place it should be. If you can do this once or twice for ten to fifteen seconds it should remove the problem
3. Go for a run. Make your heart rate go up and you'll be using up all that adrenaline too. Regular exercise also helps you to reduce stress levels over all.

Panic attacks are experienced by a huge range of people from all walks of life. However they don't need to be a life sentence and are treatable. Learning to manage that first onset of panic will help free you and help you get your control back.