

PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks are episodes of acute fear that can appear suddenly and incapacitate without apparent cause or rational explanation. For many, it is so irrational that they are afraid to tell anyone about their incident for fear they will be judged mad, crazy, or insane. Some have described their attacks as feeling like they will faint or even die on the spot. They can't breathe, their hyperventilating, their heart is pounding like a drum, their hands are trembling, and their legs feel like jello.

Typically, a panic attack is preceded by a period of stress overload. The person experiencing it may feel generally rundown, poorly nourished for the amount of stress being carried. Frequently he or she is exercising a great deal of introspection and worry about stress-related symptoms.

Before proceeding with the strategies outlined below, it is necessary for a medical doctor, one with a good understanding of nutrition and the effect of body chemistry on the autonomic nervous system, to eliminate certain conditions which could be organic causes for episodes of panic. Let your doctor know you wish to eliminate potential causes. Take control of your body and mind. Don't permit anyone to get you into a chemical drug/medication trap without a second opinion and clear evidence of an organic problem.

RECOVERY

This is an outline of a 7-step program utilized by the Panic Attack Sufferers Support Group (PASS). It is basic and easy to understand. It is easy to accomplish but requires a major willingness to make changes. If we continue to do the same things, we continue to get the same results. A willingness to do something different from what we currently do is necessary for this program to minimize your attacks of panic, fear and terror.

STEP 1: DIET

- As panic attacks are often related to the body's blood sugar, eat balanced meals based on the basic four food groups. Eliminate simple sugars such as corn syrup.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Spread out your meals, eat 5 or 6 small meals each day.
- Have small amounts of protein with each meal.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Take a daily multivitamin.
- Go easy on fats and salt.

STEP 2: RELAXATION

Relaxation is a learned skill that needs daily practice. Body chemistry changes with relaxation. Endorphins which promote good, calm feelings are produced under circumstances of relaxation, and adrenalin—which is often associated with panic and fear—is lessened. Practice diaphragmatic breathing (laughing creates the perfect diaphragmatic breath). Learn to stretch your body with slow soft stretches through tai chi or dancing. Learn progressive relaxation from audio or videos.

Learn this quieting reflex which you can do unobtrusively anywhere, anytime. Practice this until you can perform it instantly at times of panic onset. It really help.

- Smile inwardly. Unclench your teeth and jaw.
- Tell yourself, “My eyes are twinkling and sparkling.”
- Imagine inhaling through the soles of your feet, up through your legs and into your stomach. Feel the upward flow of warmth and heaviness.
- Imagine the air flowing back down through your feet and out the soles, taking all the tension along with it. Let your jaw, tongue and shoulders go limp.

STEP 3: EXERCISE

A regular exercise routine provides effective oxygenation of your body. It need not be overly strenuous, just regular. Try swimming, brisk walking, running in place, bike riding, rowing, dancing, jogging, rope jumping, calisthenics. Among all its other benefits, exercise also helps dissipate anger. Common sense precautions:

- Check with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.
- Don't begin if you are just recovering from a cold, flu or other illness.
- Start gradually and don't overdo it. Pace yourself. Work at a comfortable speed.
- Always begin by warming up with stretches to wake up the body and prevent injury.

STEP 4: ATTITUDE

Letting go to be in control. Paradoxical? Yes. But it works. Learning to honor and develop your courageous self. Using positive imagery and affirmations.

STEP 5: IMAGINATION

Be open to new situations, be open to learning. Use visualization and positive affirmations.

STEP 6: SOCIAL SUPPORT

Network and spend time with others who speak your loss language.

STEP 7: YOUR SPIRITUAL SIDE

Tap into your spiritual side.