

Panic Disorder: The Fear of Panic and Anxiety Attacks

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Panic Disorder is the fear of panic and anxiety attacks. This disorder sometimes develops because someone is ambushed out of the blue by a panic or anxiety attack that appears to make no sense, seems unpredictable and results in a profound loss of control. The necessary and effective treatment for panic disorder, whether medical or psychological, is to restore your sense of control over your own body.

There are three aspects of any anxiety problem. Depending on the kind of anxiety one aspect may be more important than another as far as how to overcome it. When it comes to panic these three aspects are: 1) Physical, an intense fear reaction with dramatic symptoms, 2) Mental, thoughts and beliefs that reinforce the fear reaction, and 3) Actions, behavior to escape and avoid anything that might evoke panic.

In this article I am going to focus on treatments involving number 3. There are a set of treatments called "exposure". This is the psychological word for what our grandparents meant when they told us, "When you fall off your horse, get back in the saddle". In other words, rather than avoid your fear, face it.

Not all exposure is helpful. Usually being exposed to something is how you get the fear in the first place! There is a fundamental difference between the kind of exposure that causes the problem and the kind that cures the problem. Among other things, it has to do with how the exposure happens. The kind that leads toward a cure is the kind that is voluntarily chosen. The key difference is you deliberately expose yourself to the fear. You must choose to do it. No one can make you do this. This is probably unimaginably scary but there are various ways to make this work for you.

There are two ways of doing this. You can do it gradually and break it into steps or you can do it all at once. Doing it gradually is called systematic desensitization and all at once is called flooding. Either of these can be done in both imagination and/or reality. Sometimes people will start with doing something in their mind's eye and then move to doing it behaviorally. For example, if you fear heights you can imagine being up high first and then second, actually go up high. This can be broken into a lot of gradual steps alternating between imagined and actual exposure to the fear.

If you have tried medication and talking about your fear but are still not seeing much progress then you probably need to consider exposure as your next course of action. Sometimes people use a stair metaphor for gradual exposure. You break your fear into steps and start with the easiest working up to the hardest. You take one step at a time and stay on that step until it is no longer scary (consider it overcome when it gets boring).

Whether you decide to do this gradually or all at once, don't be surprised if the first thing you notice is your fear getting worse at first. Remember, you have been afraid of this for a long time. The absolute key is to stay in the fear. This is called habituation. Imagine walking into a rock concert right in front of the speakers. The sound is overwhelming at first but if you stay and listen you get used to it. The same thing happens with fear.

Panic disorder is a bit more confusing than say, a fear of heights, because you are afraid of your own body. Essentially, you have a phobia of having a panic attack. But you can use the same process. You expose yourself gradually or all at once to your own fear, deliberately creating the fear.

This whole treatment is counter-intuitive. Everything in you demands you escape this. On one level this makes no sense--deliberately create your fear, invite your fear, evoke your fear in order to overcome it???

Paradoxically, this is the truth. Think of all the times in your life when you learned something new. Very often, at some point in the process, you had to do something unfamiliar, risky. It was on a small scale compared to this but the principle is the same. When you face your fear, you defeat it.

Don't do this unless you are ready. Don't do it unless you are ready to feel anxious-on purpose-for at least an hour or more. It won't be anything you haven't already felt. But you must be ready to chose this. Don't half chose it. Try it on a small scale, put it to the test. Read more about this process so you understand it. Don't take my word for it, find out for yourself.

Thank you for reading my article. If you have anxiety or know someone with anxiety, I believe I may have some information that will interest you. Here is the link: www.myanxiouschild.com. A colleague and I have created an audio program for kids approximately ages 6-12 to treat their anxiety. My daughter had a panic disorder and I was desperate to find her written or audio resources. There was nothing that addressed anxiety thoroughly from the perspective of a child. There was plenty of help for parents but nothing that would give a mom and dad a shared language and framework that made sense to them and their child. Without common ground, parents and kids don't have a way to talk about this painful disorder. So we created something that is completely new. It is called Turnaround. It turned out amazing. The CD series utilizes professional actors, artists and sound engineers. If you have a child, you know more than half the battle is getting them to pay attention and stick with something. Would you do me a favor and look at our site? If you don't need it you may know someone who could use it. Thank you and I hope it will help you and your child to be free from fear! For more information go to: www.myanxiouschild.com