

## What to do

1. Know your triggers and try to remove any negativity, stress or pressure which may be adding to situation. Try to focus on positive and happy thoughts; this will help.
2. Understand the symptoms attached to your panic attacks; this helps you recognise patterns in behaviour and avoid situations where your feelings of panic may occur.
3. Accept a panic attack for what it is; this will help to reduce the symptoms
4. Make sure you: get plenty of sleep: eat well; avoid junk food and alcohol.
5. *Take control of your breathing*

This breathing technique is a way to calm the body down and restore normal breathing. With practice it can be done anywhere without other people being aware.

Place one hand gently on your tummy, just below your rib cage and above your belly button. Breathe in through the nose with the mouth closed [1,2,3,4] and out again [1,2,3,4] through the nose, keeping the mouth closed. Feel the stomach expand as you breathe in. Inflate it like a balloon; as you breathe out allow your stomach to deflate. **Not deep breathing but very rhythmic and steady.** No pause between the in and out breaths. Concentrate on your breath going in and out. Aim for 8 to 10 breaths a minute. Breathing in and out counts as one breath. This helps restore the chemical imbalance and calms you, reducing the symptoms.

Practise by lying on the bed and placing your hands gently on your stomach (where the diaphragm is) with your finger-tips touching. You breathe in the finger tips should come apart; as you breathe out they come back together again. As you get used to it practise your breathing sitting in a chair, then standing. Eventually you learn to do this anywhere in your anxious situations. Practise regularly so your body gets used to breathing this way.

**A recorded message of this technique is available 24 hours a day on 01952 680835.**



Sources: Priory Group; BBC website



# Priestlands School



## Guide to Anxiety & Panic

Learn more... Do more... Be more...

Anxiety and Panic are distressing things especially if you are new to the effects of them. They are far more common than we think.

## Anxiety

Anxiety usually happens over a period of time, and can be repeated. It can range from feelings of uneasiness in a public place to being so scared of a particular thing; something that you avoid it at all costs.

*The symptoms we experience with anxiety are real symptoms but they are not due to a physical illness.* When the body is very anxious the nervous system gives a signal for the body to release adrenalin. This in itself can cause some distressing physical symptoms.

The body activates the *fight or flight (or freeze)* response to get us ready to face danger, to either run or fight; a very primitive reaction to danger. This means that the body is working extremely hard: our heart will speed up to pump blood to the areas we most need it; our breathing gets faster to supply more oxygen to the muscles; muscles tense in preparation for important action; digestion slows down so blood may be directed to the muscles and brain. These are just a few examples of what happens to the body and will cause some of the symptoms.

*Although symptoms are unpleasant they will not harm us; they will pass. Listed below are some of the more common symptoms.*

- \* Feelings of dread, apprehension, irritability and irrational fears
- \* Heart palpitations / chest pains
- \* Difficulty breathing (or hyperventilating)
- \* Dizziness and feeling faint
- \* Inability to concentrate
- \* Exhaustion / insomnia
- \* Chills and perhaps hot flushes
- \* Stomach cramps, diarrhoea, nausea
- \* Clamminess, excessive sweating, dry mouth
- \* Muscle tension, aches and pains
- \* Pins and needles



## Panic

Panic is generally a short, intense phase. Generally it includes hyperventilation, increased heartbeat, the feelings of wanting to run away [or attack] and it can include other symptoms. If possible you should keep telling yourself, *'Nothing bad is going to happen.'*

## Hyperventilation

This can be a very frightening experience. When we are anxious we 'over-breathe' and take more air through the lungs than they can cope with. The balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide is disturbed and CO2 levels fall. This isn't dangerous, and when you calm down your breathing will return to normal. This is a normal reaction to sudden danger or excitement and the signs are easy to pick up. Over-breathing can cause panic attacks.

### What happens to the body:-

- \* Breathing and heart rates speed up
- \* Adrenalin is released into the bloodstream
- \* The nervous system is on 'red alert'
- \* Muscles tense up
- \* You might experience feelings of unreality



You might feel as if: you are not part of what is going on; people's voices seem far away. *This is quite frightening but it can't harm you.*

When the nervous system is on alert and the anxiety is high, the nervous system becomes over stimulated. It can affect body chemistry which alters the mental state. This won't harm you. When the nervous system is over stimulated it can alter feelings, thoughts and sensations. When we experience high levels of anxiety the brain decides there is too much going on and it goes into a 'self-protect mode', shutting down a bit, to have a break.