



15 Things you can do if you have a Panic Attack

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Experiencing a panic attack can be terrifying. You can feel like you cannot breathe, you are having a heart attack, or you are losing your mind. While they can't last for a long time (because it just takes too much energy which the body doesn't have to keep it going), when you feel one coming on or while you are in the middle of one, it is horrible. There are some actions you can take to help you get through a panic attack. If you do have a panic attack, before you try any actions make sure you are in a safe place. For instance, if you are driving, then pull off to the side of the road or into a parking spot. And stop the car.

Actions you can take:

1. Breathe deeply. Breathe in your nose for a count of five, hold it for a count of five, and then breathe out your mouth for a count of five.
2. Try distracting yourself. For example, start counting backward from one hundred by sevens. One hundred, ninety-three, eighty-six, etc.
3. Grounding yourself is another technique that can be helpful. Focus on 4 things you can see, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. Forcing yourself to consider something outside of yourself helps.
4. Remind yourself that panic attacks always pass and are not a sign of something harmful happening.
5. Don't try and resist a panic attack. Accepting that you are anxious but not in danger can help. You have already experienced the worst that can happen. Now you just need to ride it out. Don't try and bring a panic attack to an end. That will happen anyway no matter what you do. Try and make yourself as comfortable as possible during the panic attack.
6. Keep a diary of when panic attacks occur. Note what brings them on. Then reframe / re-interpret what is happening so you don't get anxious in those situations.
7. You could talk to yourself while the panic attack is happening. Ask yourself if this is danger or discomfort? If you have "What if....?" fears then answer them by saying "So what. I will get afraid and then calm down again."
8. Get involved in the present. People don't panic in the present. People panic when they imagine something bad happening to them in the future or past. So stay focused on the present only.
9. Work with your body. Try tensing and relaxing the muscles or parts of your body that get the most tense during a panic attack.

10. Focus on an object (this is a way of staying present). Describe the patterns, colours, shapes and size of the object to yourself. Focus all your energy on this object.
11. Picture your happy place. Examples could be a sunny beach or a cabin in the mountains.
12. Walk or engage in some other light exercise.
13. Repeat a mantra internally. For example – “This too shall pass”.
14. Smell lavender or drink chamomile tea.
15. Don't judge or criticise yourself

If you find your panic attacks increasing in frequency, getting more intense and debilitating, and nothing seems to help, seek out a mental health professional. Panic attacks can be successfully treated and you do not need to spend the rest of your life suffering from them.