Panic attacks are sudden, intense surges of fear that reach a peak. While fear is a normal response to stress, panic attacks are exaggerated forms of the fight or flight response to perceived threats. This may be due to an overworked stress response system or may occur in the context of anxiety or panic disorder, or can occur for no reason at all. Anyone can experience a panic or anxiety attack.

**Symptoms of Panic Attacks Can Include:**

- Being detached from oneself (depersonalization)
- Blurred vision
- Chest pain, tightness, or pressure
- Chills
- Concentration problems, “foggy mind”
- Dizziness, lightheaded or faint
- Dry mouth
- Fear of going crazy or losing control
- Feelings of unreality (de-realization)
- Headache
- Muscle tension
- Nausea or worsening IBS symptoms
- Numbness, tingling trembling in arms/legs
- Pounding heart or palpitations
- Ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Shaking or trembling
- Shortness of breath, sighing, hyperventilating
- Sweating, heat sensations, or shivering
- Tearfulness
- Uncontrollable crying or emotional outbursts

**Immediate Panic Attack Relief**

- **Breathe.** Take a slow breath in, tense all parts of your body, and exhale slowly. Then continue breathing slowly by inhaling through your nose for 5 seconds and gently exhaling through your mouth, as if you are blowing out a candle, for 5 seconds. Breathe this way for 5-10 minutes until you feel more relaxed.

  Another version of this is to hold your index finger about 5 inches from your mouth, pretending it is a candle and gently exhale as if gently trying to blow the flame without putting it out.

  You can also raise both arms above your head. This, in effect, causes you to breathe diaphragmatically and allows you to breathe more slowly. Another strategy is to inhale and then hold your breath for 10 seconds or more, then slowly exhale through your mouth.

- **Use Grounding.** Anchor yourself to bring gentle awareness back to your surroundings by engaging your thinking brain, which helps manage your emotional brain. Engage your thinking brain with cognitive or motor skills such as naming something you can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. For example, count backwards, speak in a foreign language you know, organize or clean your room, notice the ground beneath your feet or the sounds around you, rub your feet or hands on the carpet or a chair, or put an ice cube in a paper towel and squeeze it hard for over a minute.

  You can also talk yourself through a panic response by acknowledging this annoying panic feeling and also telling yourself that it will soon be over. This brings your attention back to the present moment instead of to the stressful thing that triggered the panic attack.

- **Learn and Practice Mindfulness.** Mindfulness includes being aware of the present moment and being nonjudgmental of it. Practice being aware of your stress levels and physical symptoms, then learn to observe them rather than react to them. Practicing relaxation strategies on a daily basis can teach you how to keep your daily stress level down. The more knowledge and coping skills you have, the more prepared you will be to understand how to manage your mind and body.

Take a walk outside; it will serve you far more than pacing around in your mind.

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