Help! My Anxiety Gives Me Anxiety

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Anxiety About Anxiety and How to End It

Symptoms of anxiety can stem from a number of varied sources. You can feel anxious about heights, spiders, bridges, loose-leaf notebook paper, or getting attacked by a shark even though you never set foot in the ocean.

When your anxiety is related to a past trauma, you can feel anxiety about being in specific locations or contacting certain people. Perhaps one of your anxiety triggers is the need to interact with other people or leave the house.

If you have obsessive-compulsive disorder, your anxiety can be triggered by fears that the stove is on or that your hands are covered with germs.

Anxiety will make you worry about pretty much anything if you let it. Some people can even worry about worrying. They can have anxiety about anxiety. They can stress about being stressed.

This idea might seem odd or bizarre to people unfamiliar with anxiety, but for those who deal with the condition every day, it is a real concern.

What Are Panic Attacks?

At its best, anxiety is an irritating combination of thoughts and feelings that mildly impede your day. At its worst, anxiety is a rush of panic, fear, and certainty that terrible results will occur.

When anxiety is at its highest, panic attacks will emerge. A panic attack is a time-limited event that can anywhere between a few seconds and 30 minutes (if your symptoms last longer than 30 minutes, it may not be a panic attack you are battling).

Although there is a specific diagnosis of panic disorder, panic attacks can be related to various other diagnoses like generalized anxiety disorder, specific phobias, social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

During this attack, you will experience a range of distressing mental and physical health symptoms like:

- Thoughts that you are dying, losing control or going crazy
- Tightness, pressure, or pain in your chest
- Shortness of breath/feeling like you cannot breathe
- Feeling dizzy, sweaty, flushed, and hot
- Quickened heart rate and shakiness

It may feel like these symptoms will never stop, but they always do. Afterward, you will feel exhausted physically and drained emotionally.

The Panic Cycle

Even when one panic attack ends, there is fear about the next one beginning. This is because panic tends to be a cyclical pattern for many.

There is a string of events that leads from one attack to another. The panic cycle includes:

- **The event.** Often, there is an event that transpires that sets the following actions in motion. It can be a physical sensation that is linked to panic symptoms, or it can be visiting a specific area.
- **The interpretation.** The move towards panic happens with interpretation. If you perceive an event, situation, symptom, or feeling as dangerous, you will respond with physical tension as your heart rate increases. During this time, your thoughts will be speeding up and more focused on worrying.
- **The attack.** Your thoughts will be racing out of control, as you are certain your demise is imminent. Your body feels like it is going to shut down due to the extreme discomfort in your chest and head. All the rational thoughts escape your brain as you are left in the grip of fear.
- **The attack concludes.** Even though it won't feel like it at the time, the attack will end. You will feel an overwhelming sense of relief rush over your body and mind.
- **New anticipation.** The relief after the attack ends does not last long. Within minutes, you begin thinking about the next attack and question when and where it will be, and how bad it will be. At this point, you begin worrying about your worry, and it restarts the panic cycle, making a future attack certain.

You Can Break the Cycle

Just because you find yourself spinning around the panic cycle does not mean that you must remain there. Feeling anxious about anxiety no longer has to be a part of your life. You can take control of your panic.

Think Prevention, Not Treatment

Relaxation techniques are extremely helpful for many people with anxiety, but if you are waiting until the panic attack starts to use your skills, you are going to be left disappointed.

Whatever relaxation you prefer (progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, guided imagery, deep breathing), practice the skills early and often. By using them when your anxiety is low, you can limit the impact of mild stressors so they do not push you towards a future attack.

Monitor

You cannot stop a panic attack that has already started, but you can avoid them by monitoring your thoughts and feelings. Looking back at the panic cycle, two areas need attention: anticipation and interpretation.

By monitoring your anticipation and interpretation of symptoms, you can identify the people, places, and things that spark your anxiety. You can acknowledge how your anxiety about anxiety feeds into your overall stress, and you can see that this self-defeating measure must end.

Interrupt

To end the panic cycle, you must interrupt your pattern. Since you have worked hard to gather information during the monitoring stage, you can now use this data to inform your interruption.

For example, when your anticipatory anxiety begins, you can tell yourself that panic attacks are nothing to fear, and you are doing your best to fight against them. By studying your interpretations, you can remind yourself to view symptoms as discomfort rather than danger.

For example, if a quickened heart rate has triggered your panic before, tell yourself that heart rates constantly change and look for other explanations for the increase. These interruptions will lead to you feeling more self-

assured and relaxed, which leads to less panic.

Anxiety is deceptive. It will make you worry about anything and everything.

Choose the path of empowerment that allows you to prevention, monitor, and interrupt the panic cycle. After all, there are better things to worry about than worry.