

PANIC ATTACKS AND HOW TO SURVIVE THEM

STUDENT COUNSELLING

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

If you would like to make an appointment to see a counsellor to learn more about this topic, please contact the counselling service on your campus.

Distance students can contact any one of the campuses. Please tell the receptionist if you need an urgent appointment.

CONTACT DETAILS

ALBANY

Health and Counselling

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm

Monday - Friday

Phone (09) 443 9783

Email: Studenthealth@massey.ac.nz

MANAWATŪ

Student Counselling Service

Turitea Campus, Palmerston North

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm

Monday - Friday

Phone (06) 350 5533

Email: s.counselling@massey.ac.nz

WELLINGTON

Student Counselling Service

Hours 8.30am - 4.30pm

Monday - Friday

Phone (04) 801 2542

<http://crow.massey.ac.nz>

<http://health-counselling.massey.ac.nz>



WHAT ARE PANIC ATTACKS?

Panic attacks are often triggered by recent stress in your life. They are an extreme form of anxiety but occur at unexpected times, often leaving sufferers afraid of venturing into public places (in case of an attack).

One minute you're feeling fine, the next you're struggling for breath and feeling sick and dizzy. The symptoms are intensely physical – and sufferers experience overwhelming terror. Often people worry they may be having a heart attack, a stroke, or losing their mind.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

PHYSICAL:

- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations (rapid or irregular heartbeat)
- Trembling or shaking
- Sweating or flushing
- Choking feelings
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Numbness or tingling in hands, arms or legs
- Dizziness or unsteadiness
- Feelings of detachment, or feeling out of touch with yourself
- Hot flushes or chills
- Fear of dying
- Fear of going crazy or out of control

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Feelings of unreality
- Intense desire to turn away
- Fear of dying, going crazy or doing something uncontrollable



WHAT CAN I DO WHEN AN ATTACK OCCURS?

Although panic attacks are frightening they do not cause you physical harm. Remind yourself the symptoms mean you are having a panic attack – not that you are about to die. The good news is that panic attacks can be managed and their impact on you greatly reduced.

Practice deep abdominal breathing. This consists of breathing in deeply and slowly through your nose, taking the air right down to your abdomen. You should see and feel your abdomen expand. Visualise the air travelling right down to your abdomen and think the word “calm” to yourself as you breathe in. Then breathe out slowly and gently through your mouth. As you breathe out visualise the stress and tension leaving your body with your breath and think the word “relax.” Deliberately let your muscles go floppy as you breathe out.

Take three deep breaths at a time. If you breathe deeply for too long you may feel dizzy from the extra oxygen. You can repeat the three breaths after a short time of breathing normally.

Don't try to fight your feelings, give them time to pass.

Resisting panic feelings is likely to make them worse. Here is a 4 step approach for coping with panic:

1. Face the symptoms, don't run from them. Say to yourself “Here is panic again, I can allow myself to go through the reactions, I have done that before.”
2. Accept what your body is doing. Fighting panic makes you tense up which increases the anxiety. The key is being able to observe what is going on without ‘panicking about the panic’
3. Float through it rather than force through it. Adopt phrases like “This too shall pass.”
4. Allow time to pass. Panic attacks generally reach their peak at about four minutes, and have usually lost their intensity by ten minutes. Remind yourself it will soon be over.

DO I NEED TO SEEK HELP FOR MY PANIC ATTACK/S?

About one in ten people experience a panic attack at some time in their lives. Usually this follows a period of stress and no further attacks occur. In this case it will usually be enough to be aware of the symptoms and how to manage an attack.

About three percent of the population experience recurring panic attacks. Frequently occurring panic attacks can impact heavily on your life and make you feel afraid of doing things that weren't a problem before. In this case it's important to seek help.

You can discuss your symptoms with your doctor, who may suggest you visit a counsellor or psychologist.

WHAT ABOUT PREVENTION?

Other things that have been shown to help reduce panic attacks:

- Regular practice of relaxation
- Regular exercise
- Elimination of caffeine, sugar, nicotine and other stimulants from diet
- Becoming more adept at acknowledging and expressing feelings
- Build up a list of positive coping statements

