

Panic Away



How to End Panic Attacks
and General Anxiety Fast



Barry McDonagh

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Barry Joseph McDonagh

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“Funny; you know, of all the ‘medical professionals’ that I have been to over the years, alternate and mainstream, not one of them suggested your approach to the problem, yet it is so simple!”

“...I am in tears (of joy) as I write this. I feel that I am no longer living in a mental prison. Yesterday, and today, I drove my car in traffic; traffic was my biggest fear, other than crowded places, and I did not panic. I am so happy about this.”

“I have suffered with panic attacks for 15 years and all the counseling, medication and books I have purchased within the 15 years just masked the fear, but never eliminated it for good. Your book was amazing from the first page to the last. Your knowledge has put me at peace and your wording was clear and understanding. Perfect.”

“I feel pretty strongly about this book and what it has done for me after years and years of trying all sorts of different things from hypnotherapy to meditation to sheer ‘mind-over-matter.’ No more days and nights consumed by thoughts of panic attacks -it’s just bliss. I love it.”

“As a frequent business traveler, this was a huge issue in my life. I started the Panic Away program six weeks ago and was absolutely amazed at how quickly it helped me.”

“I cannot believe what an impact your program has made on my life. I have lived with OCD since I was in junior high and have had severe general anxiety my whole life. Your program has given me so much. I cannot believe how quickly it worked.”

“Before taking your course I was drowned in general anxiety and panic attacks every time I left my house to the point that I never wanted to leave home. Now I am a happier person, a much better mom and my surroundings have changed incredibly. I never want to stay home and I will never send someone else to the grocery store again.”

“I’ve suffered from GAD and claustrophobia for 18 years. I was using drugs and alcohol to get through flights. I felt very skeptical using this program at first but today I no longer need crutches to fly and no longer fear holidays! It has changed my life.”

“I would drive around, anxious of what might happen., I was scared to go to work, and I was prohibiting myself from enjoying the outgoing life that I had once had. That has all changed; the daytime anxious feelings are now extremely rare, and panic is no longer a terror for me. Thank you for showing me the natural way out.”

For Rejane and Sophia

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Preface

Every single person can eliminate their anxiety by following the Panic Away Program. No exceptions! I can speak with authority on this because I've seen it eliminate anxiety for countless people who would have deemed themselves incurable. My conviction is strengthened by the fact that many of these people spent years searching for a cure from doctors, psychologists, and alternative practitioners. After completing the Panic Away Program, their emails frequently have the same sentiment:

I wish I'd found this earlier. I spent so many years approaching this the wrong way. Why had no one explained this to me before?

If you experience panic attacks or general anxiety you probably feel like the ground has been pulled from beneath your feet. Your sense of security is shaken and day-to-day reality can feel a little strange. Panic Away will teach you in a very simple, step-by-step way to quickly feel more grounded and secure within yourself again. Like all goals that are worth achieving, you need to implement and practice what you learn here. When you do, you will end your anxiety problem.

Preface

The content you're about to read is very unique. You won't find any of the repetitive "anxiety speak" so common in most of the published literature. I don't claim to have totally reinvented the wheel with this program, because I'm not the first to advocate for a different approach to anxiety. Many excellent doctors such as Dr. Claire Weekes and Dr. Viktor Frankl, have also put forward the same basic principles as the only truly effective approach to eliminating anxiety.

I put this course together several years ago based on what worked for me. From the continuous feedback I received over several years, I was able to fine-tune the material, making it the program it is today. It's true that I was fortunate to realize and develop the approach while I was working through my own anxiety, but I could never have made it into the success it has become today were it not for the constructive feedback of thousands of other anxiety sufferers. I would like you to therefore think of this program as a powerful piece of collective experience. I'm glad you've found your way here. You're about to learn how to kick-start an anxiety-free future.

Let's get cracking!
Barry McDonagh

Introduction

Jane has just left work and is in the supermarket doing her weekly shopping. She has a lot of things on her mind and is rushing around, throwing all the items she needs into the shopping cart. While checking the price on some soft drinks, she notices something strange. She can feel her heart beginning to beat hard—so hard, in fact, that her throat is pulsating. This startles her, and as she places the soft drink down, she notices how her left arm starts to tingle with a pins-and-needles sensation. This is the first time anything like this has ever happened to her. She’s confused and starts to get really scared. “Something must be wrong,” she thinks, and begins to mentally list all the possible things it could be: “Is this the start of a heart attack? Is it an allergic reaction to something I ate?”

Jane’s stomach and chest muscles feel really tense, and her breathing becomes faster and shallower. She glances around at the people near her, and as she does, feels light-headed and dizzy. The confusion she feels sends a cold flush of fear through her body. The sensations intensify, and she’s convinced something awful is about to happen. She feels a need to get outside, and leaves her shopping cart full of goods behind as she walks slowly, with trepidation, toward the exit.

Soon Jane is outside in the cool air. She feels a slight sense of relief and greater control as the physical sensations lose momentum. Although she’s calming down, she’s still in shock and her body is shaking. It

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feels as if someone had just held a gun to her head. She's never felt so terrified and out of control in all her life. She calls her husband at work, tells him what happened, and asks him to meet her so they can go to the hospital together.

A few hours later, Jane is lying on the hospital bed waiting for the results of medical tests. The doctor arrives and tells her that they cannot find anything physically wrong with her, that it most likely was a panic attack. This is relieving and yet confusing at the same time. "A panic attack?" she thinks. She remembers an aunt who experienced panic attacks, but Jane never really understood what that meant—and she certainly never imagined it felt as scary as what she went through. Glad that nothing is physically wrong, she checks out of the hospital with her husband and goes home. Within minutes of lying on her bed, she's fast asleep.

On waking the following day, Jane immediately begins to go over the ordeal in her mind. It all seems like a surreal dream. By lunchtime, she's already second-guessing the medical tests. She convinces herself that something was missed and that this must involve something more serious than anxiety. Days pass, and she can't stop thinking about what happened in the supermarket. She still feels shaken by the experience and

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lives in fear that it might strike her again at any moment. For the first time in her life, she doesn't feel safe leaving her home.

At the law office where she works, she feels restless and can't concentrate. When talking to colleagues, she constantly thinks about her problem. She fears she might have a similar turn at work and that everyone will think she's cracking up. If that weren't enough, she starts imagining scary scenarios, like getting locked up in a psychiatric hospital or losing her children because she can't take care of them. Each time she thinks these thoughts, her stomach jolts with a fright. She knows she isn't helping matters by thinking these things, but she can't help herself. The anxious thoughts just keep coming, and the harder she tries to stop the thoughts, the faster they swirl around her mind.

Three weeks later, Jane still feels highly anxious. She's undergone more medical tests with a doctor her friend recommended, but nothing showed up. Secretly, she was hoping for something to be wrong so she could start treating it—that would at least be something she could focus her energy on. The new doctor prescribed some anti-anxiety medication that she has not taken yet, but she will if she ever feels another panic attack coming on.

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Jane has now entered a phase called general anxiety or generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). This is a feeling of lingering anxiety accompanied by anxious thoughts. It's the type of anxiety that's there in the morning on waking, and it often lasts throughout the day. In Jane's case, it's a direct result of her obsessive worry over her condition. For her, the initial panic attack in the supermarket sparked fear and confusion, and this fear and confusion grew into general anxiety.

Jane's life has been altered dramatically since that first panic attack. She's already cancelled her European vacation with friends and told her extended family she won't be entertaining them for Christmas this year. Her husband is trying his best to understand, but he's slowly getting impatient and wishes she could pull herself together for the sake of the family. He's finding it hard to believe how the confident lawyer he married is suddenly, for no apparent reason, acting like a shadow of her former self.

For the next few months, Jane continues to move back and forth between panic attacks and general anxiety. She's become entrenched in a cycle of panic and anxiety.

What Jane experienced is probably the most common way people experience panic attacks that result in general anxiety, but it varies from person to person. Some people will experience panic attacks without

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the general anxiety, whereas others may never have panic attacks but only general anxiety.

In Jane's case, she became highly alarmed by the sensations she felt in the supermarket. That incident sent her into a period of confusion and fear. For her it felt like the ground had been pulled from beneath her feet and her sense of security was shaken. After a person has had a few out-of-the-blue panic attacks like these, it doesn't have to be a bodily sensation alone that sparks the panic. *It can turn into a fear of places or situations that the person associates with panic attacks.*

These are known as *situational panic attacks*, as opposed to spontaneous panic attacks.

For example, someone might have had a spontaneous panic attack while at a concert with friends. This person was feeling tired, and the sensations came hard and fast out of nowhere, which resulted in a panic attack. A week later, they're sitting in a theater and recall that the last time they were in a crowded space, they had a panic attack.

That thought alone makes them anxious, which in turn triggers the anxious bodily sensations, which then, of course, triggers another panic attack. You can see how a vicious cycle of fear is established. It

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becomes a fear of fear, and that's how a lot of people describe their panic disorder—a fear of fear.

People who experience frequent panic attacks often say things like:

I can't be anywhere that doesn't have an easy exit. As soon as I think I'm locked in, my heart starts pounding.

I don't like to go shopping alone, because every time I start the check-out process I feel a bit trapped, then start to feel dizzy and want to escape.

Or

I'm okay with one-to-ones, but when I have to speak to more than one person I get a really uncomfortable feeling and want to get out of the room.

The Panic Away Program teaches you a new and empowered way to respond to a panic attack as well as demonstrates how to end feelings of general anxiety, but before I continue it's important to be aware of a few basic things.

The first is that having an anxiety disorder, like panic disorder or generalized anxiety disorder, does not mean that you are going to lose control or go insane.

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It is not a mental illness.

Anxiety is a behavioral problem that can easily be corrected with the right guidance and information. That's a really important point because many people fear that their anxiety problem is a sign of a mental illness. *It is not.* **You feel the way you do because your nervous system is over sensitized.** All the uncomfortable feelings, the anxious thoughts, the panic attacks, the general anxiety, are the result of this over sensitization.

The other thing is that an anxiety disorder has nothing to do with a lack of courage, in fact it is quite the opposite. People with anxiety *actually* do the bravest things.

They get up each day and face their anxiety. They pick themselves up after every setback and deal with inner challenges *the average person never has to face.* Those close to the person experiencing anxiety have no idea how intense it can be.

I have worked with people like firemen, police officers, and soldiers who have done very brave things in their line of duty, *but tell me privately* that dealing with their anxiety has been the greatest challenge for

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them. Of course, the average person can't understand why it's such a big deal to drive on the freeway, or go to church, or even go shopping. But for the person with anxiety, accomplishing these things can be a massive achievement. It doesn't make headline news, but facing your fears daily is real bravery.

The good news is: This bravery does not go unrewarded. Once the person faces their anxiety issue, they develop an inner strength that the average person never gets to develop. You see, no matter how many brave things you do in the world, if you have not been challenged on an inner level you miss out on the opportunity to develop real inner strength.

That is the hidden opportunity anxiety presents to you: To become a bigger person than you already are. That is what you will learn with this program.

Another important point to share is that you are not in any danger from a panic attack. A panic attack **will not harm you**.

The fight or flight response that you experience during a panic attack is a built-in mechanism, going back

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to our cavemen days. It is there to protect you from danger, not to harm you. Rest assured that your body's primary goal is to keep you alive and well.

Anxiety Disorder Facts

- It is not a mental illness
- It is not a lack of courage
- A panic attack will not harm you

Panic attacks are not your enemy; they are the result of you misinterpreting the signals your body is sending—a bit like a false alarm. Think of all the panic attacks you've experienced and *how you've always come out on the other side* — possibly petrified, but nevertheless alive and undamaged. Aren't you still here, after all those attacks that convinced you that you were going to die?

From the very start of this program, I want you to know that you really are okay! Anxiety is very treatable. The sensations that terrify you are nothing more than just sensations. You are safe and by the time you have read to the end of this book, you will really appreciate that for yourself.

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You are okay, you will get better, this will not last forever!

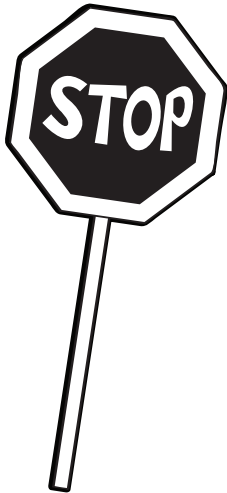
The Panic Away Program is responsible for helping many thousands of people worldwide end their anxiety disorders. At the core of the Panic Away Program is the 21-7 Technique™. You can think of this technique as first aid for anxiety. This technique is made up of two separate components. You have the 21 Second Countdown, which stops panic attacks, and then the 7 Minute Exercise, which reduces feelings of general anxiety.

Combined, they make up one of the most effective solutions for ending an anxiety disorder.

21 -7 Technique™

21 Second Countdown

- ✓ Stop Panic Attacks



7 Minute Exercise

- ✓ Ends General Anxiety



What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

There's been a lot of debate about what triggers an anxiety disorder and how it should best be treated. Some argue that it's a chemical imbalance to be treated with medication, while others suggest it's the result of internal conflicts. I've worked with numerous people who experience various kinds of anxiety disorders, and it's my opinion that in many of these cases the anxiety disorder is a result of exhaustion—physical, mental, or emotional exhaustion.

Chemical Imbalance

For many years, mental health professionals have used the term “chemical imbalance” to explain the need for medications to treat mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. This commonly used explanation suggests that anxiety is a medical problem and that it can be treated with medication. The “chemical imbalance” explanation also reflects the overall theme of treatment—identifying which neurotransmitters are involved and, with medication, attempting to return the neurotransmitter level back to the “normal” range. Two types of medications commonly recommended for anxiety are minor tranquilizers (e.g., Xanax, Ativan, Valium) and anti-depressants (e.g., Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft). Much like taking medication for any sort of physical problem, anti-anxiety medication is prescribed until the problem (hopefully) goes away.

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

It's important to point out that the chemical imbalance approach is a theory and not a fact. There's no test for chemical imbalance in the human brain. Much about the human brain is still a complete mystery, and there needs to be a lot more research into this area before anyone (including myself) can make absolute statements about the cause of anxiety disorders. Regardless of the lack of evidence, many in the West are absolutely convinced that all anxiety is the result of a chemical imbalance.

This position doesn't make sense to me. Take the example of a fireman who suffers from panic attacks. He's able to work as a fireman, in situations of extreme stress, without experiencing any panic symptoms whatsoever. But when he has to sit in the barber's chair to get his hair cut, he always has a panic attack because he feels trapped and cannot escape. Are the chemicals in his brain causing him to panic? No, obviously not. It's a behavioral reaction to the situation in which he finds himself. What you see with almost all people who experience regular panic attacks is that they occur in certain situations, and they're dependent on a range of external and internal circumstances.

For example, if a train suddenly stops on the tracks between stations, anyone on board with a panic disorder might start to feel a bit anxious. The driver announces to everyone that they'll have to wait in

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

their seats until the problem is fixed. Suddenly the anxious person feels very uncomfortable and may even start to panic. The additional anxiety comes from a mental evaluation of the situation:

Trapped on train = limited mobility = no escape = PANIC

Two minutes later, the driver says it was a false alarm and the journey can continue. Panic stops. This is just one example, but there are many different examples of how anxiety and panic are a result of people's thoughts rather than a chemical imbalance over which the person has no control.

My feeling is that those who seek to profit from the sale of prescription drugs are responsible for promoting the chemical imbalance theory so aggressively. It may be the case that other, more serious mental health issues such as manic depression or schizophrenia really are the result of a chemical imbalance, but I don't believe it to be the case for anxiety disorders. Having said all that, I'm not totally against the use of medication for treating anxiety. Medication can play a role for some individuals who find it very difficult to get started on the road to recovery.

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

It is worth pointing out that the chemical imbalance theory should not be confused with hormonal changes. There is a real link between anxiety and hormonal fluctuations experienced by women during Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS), post-childbirth, and perimenopause (the period of time before the onset of menopause).

Physical, Mental, and Emotional Exhaustion

One of the world's foremost anxiety experts, the late Dr. Claire Weekes, described how many anxiety disorders start from a type of exhaustion—physical, mental, or emotional. When depleted in any one of these areas, the body and mind become very sensitized and susceptible to “nervous illness” (an old term she used for what's known today as an anxiety disorder).

Under physical exhaustion I include things such as poor diet, substance abuse, and bodily changes like perimenopause. Mental exhaustion is often brought about by excessive worry or stress, and emotional exhaustion can be connected to issues like bereavement or divorce.

Dr. Weekes described the sensitized state as a person feeling jittery and susceptible to any shock, be it internal (e.g., rapid heartbeat) or external (e.g., a door slamming). The more confused people become

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

about the sensations they feel, the more they fear that something is seriously wrong with their minds or bodies. An anxious thought about a change in the rhythm of the body can send the body into a tailspin of anxiety, as is the case with panic attacks.

A cycle of fear and confusion over the sensitized state gradually turns into an anxiety disorder.

The disorder can last for weeks to years, depending on the kind of help the person gets. For the average person caught in a state of anxiety, the world appears out of sync. Thoughts don't seem to flow as they once did. Waking in the morning is usually followed by a sense of dread, and something as simple as shopping or having a conversation with someone becomes an ordeal.

Dr. Weekes pointed out how easy it is for people to form phobias when dealing with constant anxiety. For example, people may feel a bit uneasy while sitting in traffic because a thought has scared them into thinking that they're trapped in their car and have no means of escape. This can then translate, over time, into a fear of driving or being in any situation where there's no easy exit. In more extreme cases, it gets to the point where people only feel safe in their own homes (agoraphobia).

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

The connection between anxiety disorders and a sensitized state is a theory further developed in the 1980's by Steven Reiss and Richard J. McNally. They called this sensitized state 'anxiety sensitivity' and currently more than 1,100 published studies have validated this theory.

They argued that a small percentage of the population experience high anxiety sensitivity, making them more susceptible to an anxiety disorder. An anxiety sensitivity index (ASI) was created—a tool with which people can measure their stress sensitivity via self-scoring. It is used to assess anxiety disorders in many thousands of patients every year.

People with anxiety sensitivity frequently interpret the bodily sensations associated with stress as a sign of impending health problems. A pounding heart becomes a potential heart attack, a tight chest is a breathing problem, a racing mind turns into a fear of mental illness. The average person pays little attention to these sensations. The person with anxiety sensitivity, however, can react with fear and even panic.

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

Internal Conflict

Another trigger of panic attacks and general anxiety can be inner conflict issues. An inner conflict may be the result of unresolved issues like abuse, neglect, or a traumatic incident resulting in post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In such cases the person is usually aware of what the issue is, as they frequently wrestle with it on a mental and emotional level. There may also be a connection here with substance abuse such as alcoholism or drug abuse.

In my experience, most of the people I am in contact with fall into the 'exhaustion/sensitivity' category, but in cases where there is an emotional issue that needs to be addressed, it is important for the person to seek therapy. Therapy in such cases helps to directly address the issue and ensure a lasting recovery from anxiety.

So How Does a Person End an Anxiety Disorder?

Recovery happens by teaching the person a new and empowered response to the sensations associated with anxiety. Once a person is trained how to respond correctly to these sensations, the cycle of panic and

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

anxiety (fear feeding off fear) is broken and a natural state of calm returns.

The Panic Away Program teaches a person how to achieve this in a very simple, yet powerful way through the 21-7 Technique™. The panic attacks are eliminated by using the *21 Second Countdown* and the general anxiety is lowered right back down to a normal level using the *7 Minute Exercise*.

The 21-7 Technique™ removes the fear and creates an opportunity for healing to occur. **Anxiety disorders are not permanent; don't let anyone convince you differently.** When fear and confusion are removed, the body heals itself naturally within a relatively short period of time.

Up until now you may have felt very misunderstood and isolated, as those around you fail to fully understand what you are going through. People close to you want you to feel better but can sometimes make unhelpful remarks like '*you have to just learn to relax*', '*it's all in your mind*', and '*come on, pull yourself together*'. Such remarks are generally made with good intentions but prove of little value to the person experiencing an anxiety disorder.

What Causes an Anxiety Disorder?

Lastly, I must point out that anyone who experiences any of the symptoms associated with an anxiety disorder should undergo a full medical check up to ensure there is no underlying medical issue causing the symptoms. For example, it has been found that some people diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, can have underlying medical conditions such as hypoglycemia (low blood-glucose levels), hyperthyroidism (excessive hormones released by the thyroid gland), inner ear infections, and certain types of heart conditions such as mitral valve prolapse. Having a full check up is vital as it will enable your doctor to identify if any of the above conditions are present.

21-7 Technique™

Before we begin, you need to fully understand how a panic attack functions. That way, you'll be better able to implement the technique.

Anxiety is probably the most basic of all emotions. While it is, by nature, an unpleasant sensation, it's not by any means dangerous. One of the biggest myths surrounding anxiety is that it's harmful and can lead to a number of various life-threatening conditions.

Anxiety is defined as a state of apprehension or fear resulting from the anticipation of a real or imagined threat, event, or situation. It's one of the most common human emotions experienced by people at some point in their lives. However, most people who have never experienced panic attacks or extreme anxiety fail to realize the terrifying nature of the experience. Extreme dizziness, blurred vision, tingling, and feelings of breathlessness—and that's just the tip of the iceberg!

When these sensations occur and people don't understand why, they feel they've contracted an illness or serious mental condition. The threat of losing complete control seems very real and, naturally, very terrifying.

21-7 Technique™

Fight/Flight Response

I'm sure most of you have heard of the fight/flight response, coined by Walter Cannon, as an explanation for your condition. Have you made the connection between this response and the unusual sensations you experience during and after a panic attack?

Anxiety is a response to danger or a threat. It is so named because all of its effects are aimed toward either fighting or fleeing from the danger. Thus, the sole purpose of anxiety is to protect the individual from harm. It was vital in the daily survival of our ancient ancestors; when faced with some danger, an automatic response would take over that propelled them to take immediate action, such as to attack or run. Even in today's hectic world, this is a necessary mechanism. It is useful when you must respond to a real threat within a split second, like jumping out of the way of an oncoming bus!

Anxiety is a built-in mechanism to protect us from danger. Interestingly, it's a mechanism that **protects but does not harm**—an important point that I'll elaborate upon later. Note that there's a third element to the fight/flight response that's not often mentioned—the freeze response. This is when the person

21-7 Technique™

is paralyzed by fear and stays very still. People who experience this describe that they feel rooted to the ground with fear and can't move until the anxiety abates.

Physical Manifestations of a Panic Attack

Nervousness and Chemical Effects

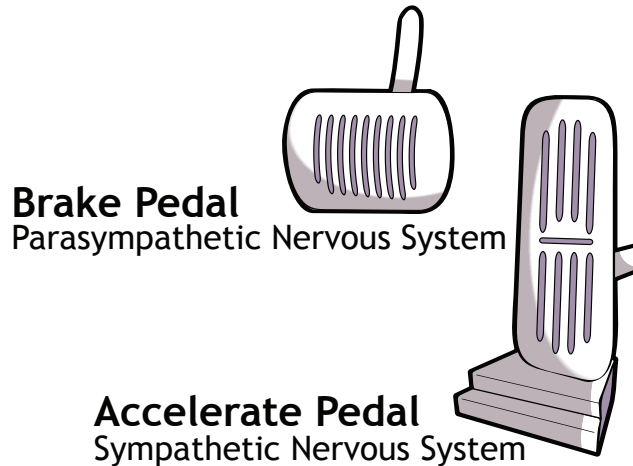
When confronted with danger, the brain sends signals to the automatic nervous system. This system is responsible for gearing the body up for action, as well as calming the body down and restoring equilibrium. To carry out these two vital functions, the autonomic nervous system has two subsections: the *sympathetic nervous system* and the *parasympathetic nervous system*.

Robert Sapolsky of Stanford University describes this dual role of the nervous system like the brake and accelerate pedals of a car. At any one time you can only be doing a single action, accelerating or braking. The sympathetic nervous system is the acceleration pedal that we tend to know all too much about. It speeds us up by priming our body for action and readies us for the fight/flight response. The

21-7 Technique™

parasympathetic nervous system is the brake. It serves as our restoration system, which returns the body to a state of calm.

The Human Nervous System



21-7 Technique™

When either of these systems is activated, the whole body is stimulated, having an “all or nothing” effect. This explains why, when a panic attack occurs, the individual often feels a number of different sensations throughout the body.

The sympathetic system (accelerate pedal) is responsible for releasing the adrenaline from the adrenal glands, small glands located just above the kidneys. When a panic attack begins, it doesn't switch off as easily as it's turned on. There's always a period of what would seem to be increased or continued anxiety as these messengers travel throughout the body.

After a period of time, the parasympathetic nervous system (brake pedal) gets called into action to slow things down and return the body to normal functioning once the perceived danger is gone. The parasympathetic system is what we all know and love, because it returns us to a calm, relaxed state.

When we engage in a relaxation strategy that we've learned, we are, in fact, willing the parasympathetic nervous system into action. A good thing to remember is that this system is brought into action at some stage whether we command it or not. The body cannot continue in an ever-increasing spiral of anxiety.

21-7 Technique™

It reaches a point where it simply must kick in and slow things down. Don't fear that a panic attack will never end—it will. This is one of the many built-in protection systems the body has for survival.

You can do your best with worrying thoughts, and keep pressing the accelerate pedal (prolonging sympathetic nervous system activity), but eventually you will slow down. Your body realizes that there really is no danger and takes the foot off the gas. Your body is incredibly intelligent—modern science is always discovering amazing patterns of intelligence that run throughout its cells. The human body seems to have infinite ways of dealing with the most complicated array of functions that we take for granted.

Rest assured that your body's primary goal is to keep you alive and well.

Not so convinced?

Try holding your breath for as long as you can. No matter how strong your mental will is, it can never override the will of the body. This is good news—no matter how hard you try to convince yourself that you're going to die from a panic attack, you won't. Your body will override that fear and search for a state of balance. There has never been a reported incident of someone dying from a panic attack.

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Your mind may make the sensations continue longer than your body intended, but eventually everything will return to a state of balance. In fact, our body continually strives for balance (homeostasis).

The interference of a panic attack, from your body's point of view, is nothing more than the sensations associated with doing rigorous exercise. Your body is not alarmed by these symptoms. Why should it be? It knows its own capabilities. It's your mind that panics and overreacts in terror. People tend to fear the worst and exaggerate their bodily sensations. A quickened heartbeat becomes a heart attack. An overactive mind seems like a close shave with schizophrenia. Is it your fault? Not really—you're mind is simply diagnosing from poor information.

Cardiovascular Effects

Activity in the sympathetic nervous system increases our heartbeat, speeds up the blood flow throughout the body, and ensures that all areas are well-supplied with oxygen and that waste products are removed. This happens in order to prime the body for action.

A fascinating feature of the fight/flight mechanism is that tightened blood vessels channel blood away from areas where it's immediately not needed to areas where it's urgently needed.

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For example, should there be a physical attack, blood drains from the skin, fingers, stomach, and toes so that less blood is lost, and it's moved to “active areas,” such as the thighs and biceps, to help the body prepare for action.

This is why many feel numbness and tingling in their arms and stomach during a panic attack, which is often misinterpreted as a serious health risk such as the precursor to a heart attack. Interestingly, most people who suffer from anxiety often feel they have heart problems. If you're really worried that such is the case, visit your doctor and have your heart checked. At least you can then put your mind at rest.

Respiratory Effects

One of the scariest effects of a panic attack is the fear of suffocating or smothering. It's very common during a panic attack to feel tightness in the chest and throat. I'm sure everyone can relate to some fear of losing control of breathing. From personal experience, anxiety grows from the fear that your breathing itself will cease and you will be unable to recover. Can a panic attack stop your breathing? No.

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A panic attack is associated with an increase in the speed and depth of breathing. This has obvious importance for the body's defense, since the tissues need to get more oxygen to prepare for action. The feelings produced by this increase in breathing, however, can include: breathlessness, hyperventilation, sensations of choking or smothering, and even pains or tightness in the chest. The real problem is that these sensations are alien to us—they feel unnatural.

Having experienced extreme panic attacks myself, I remember that on many occasions I would have this feeling that I couldn't trust my body to do the breathing for me. As a result, I would have to manually take over and tell myself when to breathe in and when to breathe out. Of course, this didn't suit my body's oxygen requirement, so the sensations would intensify—along with the anxiety. It was only when I employed the technique I'll describe for you later that I let my body continue doing what it does best—run the whole show.

Importantly, a side effect of increased breathing (especially if no actual activity occurs) is actually a decrease in the blood supply to the head. While such a decrease is only a small amount and isn't at all dangerous, it produces a variety of unpleasant but harmless symptoms that include dizziness, blurred vision, confusion, a sense of unreality, and hot flushes.

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Other Physical Effects of Panic Attacks

A number of other effects are produced by the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (the accelerate pedal). For example, the pupils widen to let in more light, which may result in blurred vision, or “seeing stars,” etc. There’s a decrease in salivation, resulting in dry mouth. There’s decreased activity in the digestive system, which often produces nausea, or butterflies in the stomach, and even constipation. Finally, many of the muscle groups tense up in preparation for fight or flight. This results in feelings of tension, sometimes extending to actual aches and pains as well as trembling and shaking.

To sum up, the fight/flight response results in a general activation of the overall body metabolism. Thus, one often feels hot and flushed and, because this process takes a lot of energy, the person can feel tired and drained.

Mental Manifestations

The body’s goal of the fight/flight response is to make the individual aware of the potential danger that may be present. Therefore, when activated, the mind’s priority is placed upon searching the surroundings

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for potential threats. In this state, one is highly strung, so to speak. It's very difficult to concentrate on any one activity, because the mind has been trained to seek all potential threats and not to give up until the threat has been identified. As soon as the panic hits, many people look for the quickest and easiest exit from their current surroundings, such as by simply leaving the shopping and walking outside. Often the anxiety can heighten further, if we perceive that leaving will cause some sort of social embarrassment or misunderstanding.

The burning question is this: why is the fight/flight response activated when there's apparently nothing to be frightened of?

As mentioned previously, I believe the trigger for panic attacks and other forms of general anxiety is most often related to a physical, mental, or emotional exhaustion which then leads to a sensitized anxious state.

- Physical exhaustion can be the result of overwork and lack of rest. Under this category, I also include exhaustion caused by bad eating habits and substance abuse.
- Mental exhaustion is often the result of habitual worry or mental stress, making the individual feel mentally drained.

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- Emotional exhaustion is linked to matters of the heart. It may be relationship problems, bereavement, or conflict with loved ones.

There's almost always an overlap between these categories, making it difficult for the mind and body to find rest. Exhaustion leads to people feeling very sensitized or on edge. Any small shock can make them jump with more fear than normal. If a car backfires on the street, this person is the first to hit the floor. In a sensitized state even small things, like forgetting to call back a friend, can cause unnecessary anxiety. I think most people can relate to this and have experienced this feeling at some point. Anyone who enjoys a few drinks too many will be familiar with this sensitized state when the hangover kicks in the following morning.

When people are sensitized in this manner, they frequently report experiencing unusual sensations. We've discussed some of those sensations previously, but here's a quick summary¹:

- Trembling or shaking
- Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate
- Sweating

1 DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition)

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- Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
- Feelings of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint
- Feelings of “unreality” or being detached from oneself
- Fear of losing control or going crazy
- Numbness or tingling sensations

Experiencing any of the above sensations can be very unsettling, especially when they land out of the blue. Naturally, it goes without saying that all sensations causing concern should be investigated with a medical doctor to rule out other possible causes.

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If you're reading this, I'm sure you're well aware of how terrifying a panic attack can feel. Our thoughts race with the possibility of a mind and body out of control. We put to use every coping mechanism we have, and when they fail we feel vulnerable and alone with a myriad of confusing bodily sensations and terrifying thoughts.

The *21 Second Countdown* is a technique that can be applied to stop a panic attack in 21 seconds flat. It is a very unique approach that probably contradicts most of what you have learnt about controlling anxiety. Before I explain how to do the technique I am going to describe the core fundamentals behind the technique so you have a complete understanding of how it works.

The traditional approach to dealing with panic attacks is flawed. People are continuously taught to cope in order to “beat” their anxiety. Coping techniques are numerous and prescribed or taught like “weapons” to overcome the dangerous assailant, the panic attack. Even the term “panic attack” is suggestive of battle and conflict. Panic attacks are described as outside forces that want to see their sufferers defeated. The real truth of the matter is that there's no real attack or attacker. **Panic attacks are not your enemy and they are not threatening or dangerous;** they are an overreaction to a series of heightened bodily sensations. But

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where does the true answer to a panic-free life lie? Does it lie in a continuous battle to thwart the advance of anxiety, or must sufferers be resigned to live with a condition that will plague them their whole lives?

For me, the answer was discovered by observing nature. Nature is a great teacher. Watch how it deals with opposing forces. The tree bends with the wind, the river flows around the rock, summer gives way to fall. Nature never struggles, never resists. Everything flows with an innate acceptance, and therein lies the key to dealing with panic attacks.

Our primordial instincts tell us to pull away and guard ourselves from fear. We either fight it with our best coping technique or simply close down and run to a safe refuge. All of these actions create an internal struggle. Like a tug-of-war, in the case of a panic attack we pull and push against the oncoming anxiety with all the resistance we can muster as we try to cope with the situation. This struggle results in even further inner stress, fear, and conflict.

We think nervously, “What if I lose this fight?” and “What will happen if anxiety wins over me? Will I be hospitalized—or worse, go insane?” As we wrestle with these thoughts, we tighten our mental grip and

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pull away from the threat by attempting to suppress the sensations. We may swallow relaxant medication, begin a series of coping exercises, or even drink some alcohol in order to suppress the terrifying feelings that are coursing through our body.

Sometimes, when we're lucky, we're in good fighting condition and the fear appears to subside. Other times, we lose outright and experience full-blown panic attacks as the fear engulfs our emotions and leaves us feeling vulnerable and terrified. Whichever way it transpires, we're always left with one lasting and recurring thought: "When will this strike again? When will I have to do battle with this terror again?"

As soon as we see the telltale signals of a panic attack—such as quickened breath or an increased heart rate—we immediately jump to try to curtail and control the sensations in the hope of enforcing a state of relative tranquility. Those who suffer from regular panic attacks often mention that their predominant fear is losing control of their body or mind. We do our best to suppress the sensations, and by doing so, don't allow our bodies to flow in the heightened state caused by the fight/flight response.

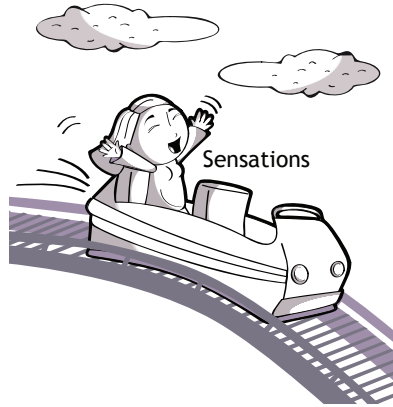
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It's important to understand that panic attacks are not harmful. Remind yourself of all the previous times you've emerged unscathed from your panic attacks. Think of all the panic attacks you've experienced and how you've always come out on the other side—possibly petrified, but nevertheless alive and undamaged, with no harm done to your body except for possible fatigue. The real issue that causes most of the upset and understandable distress is the fear of what a panic attack might do.

So where does this leave us? The first clue to successful recovery lies in our ability to run with a panic attack, not against it. **We need to learn how to turn this sheer terror into sheer excitement.**

Do you realize that there's a big similarity between a panic attack and a roller coaster ride? Both are exhilarating experiences that excite our nervous system and cause all manner of heightened bodily sensations. The roller coaster, however, does not cause us to panic because we're aware that the heightened bodily sensations are all part of the ride that we decided to participate in.

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*This is the same attitude we need to adopt towards a panic attack. **WE ARE GOING TO TRANSFORM OUR FEAR INTO EXCITEMENT!***

Once the anxiety ride starts, you are no longer going to panic because you understand what is happening and have a new way of dealing with it. *You decide to buckle yourself in and participate fully.*

What does that mean in practical terms? It means that if you participate with the fear and let the

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emotions and sensations run freely through you, rather than close down in the face of an imminent panic attack, your fear subsides. The sensations that usually terrify you become exactly that—sensations, or an aroused nervous system and nothing more (such as sweating palms, palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, etc.). These are the same bodily sensations your nervous system creates when excited.

Are you aware that on a physiologically level, feeling anxious and feeling excited are very similar? In both circumstances your nervous system is aroused. The big difference is that feeling excited is mentally a much better place to be. It is a positive state of mind that allows you to engage with life compared to an anxious mind that keeps you trapped in a cycle of fear.

The mistake people make when they feel anxiety or panic is that they desperately want to stop the bodily sensations of their aroused nervous system, so that they can feel safe and in control again. Some swallow medications while others use distraction or coping techniques to reach this goal.

The problem with that approach is that once your nervous system is aroused you can't just switch it off. Trying to switch from an anxious state, to a calm state, is like trying to switch from hot to cold. It takes

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time to cool things down.

A much faster solution is to go from anxious ‘hot’ to excited ‘hot’. It’s faster because you don’t need the bodily sensations to end in order to feel better. By turning your anxiety into excitement, you remove the fear factor while still feeling physically aroused. After a short period of time, a state of clam arrives naturally all by itself. That is the essence of what you will be learning with this technique.

The 21 Second Countdown is first part of the 21-7 Technique™ and deals specifically with stopping panic attacks by changing your reaction to the sensations you feel. It’s comprised of four simple steps. Those steps are: **observe, embrace, demand more, and trust.** What you will be learning here is how to bring those four steps into a simple 21 Second Countdown that you can do *anytime, anywhere*.

After that we will look at the *7 Minute Exercise*, which is designed to reduce general anxiety.

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The Four Steps of the 21 Second Countdown

Step 1 = Observe

When you feel a panic attack approach you are going to process the fear so that your emotions can run freely, rather than become locked in a cycle of recurring anxiety. So begin by observing the fear as it rises within you. What we're looking for is a conscious recognition of panic attacks, and a new and empowered response to them when they arise. We want a response that will defuse the panic attack in its tracks and clear the pattern of recurring attacks.

Observe the familiar patterns that manifest during the initial moments of a panic attack. For many, it may simply be a feeling of unease in the stomach, shortness of breath, or increased heartbeats. The symptoms usually begin on a very subtle level, sometimes hours before the actual attack.

When you observe the initial sensations that usually accompany a panic attack, acknowledge to yourself that now is the time to apply your new understanding. You're not setting the scene to have a tug of war with the anxiety as before. Instead, this time you're excited and ready to implement a new, empowered approach.

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Step 2 = Embrace

Embrace the fear as it rises within you. Mentally send it a short message, telling it that you're glad it's come to visit and you're sending it a warm welcome. The panic attack is not your enemy, so invite this feeling into your body and mind, and treat it like an old friend. Accept the uncomfortable experience fully. Welcome it closer, because you want to get to know it and observe it. It's not unusual to feel a little apprehensive at this point, because this new approach of inviting the anxiety closer and treating it like a friend may feel unusual. You're actually inviting and greeting the panic that normally upsets and terrifies you. Try to genuinely welcome and embrace the anxiety and sensations with open arms and make no effort to suppress what you are feeling.

Be firm. Just watch as the feeling of fear rises and draws nearer. If you're the visual type, you might want to give the anxiety a mental image such as a troublesome child or ridiculous cartoon character with big feet.

Let the fear wash over you. Feel each and every bodily sensation in detail. You're not trying to get away

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from the panic attack this time—in fact, you’re allowing it to excite your whole body. By embracing the fear in this manner, you start to process the sensations and your emotions begin to flow with the experience rather than against it. **Flowing with the experience causes less psychological friction within you.** Keep with the bodily sensations, and feel them like you’re sitting in shallow water on the beach with the tide washing over your body. Each rush of adrenaline is another wave rushing over you. It is scary but also exciting at the same time.

There will come a point when you can observe and embrace the panic attack to an extent, and then it will overwhelm you. Then you’ll want to either fight it or retreat to safety. This is understandable because the bodily sensations can often be very uncomfortable. However, this is the vital point in the process. It signals the moment to do something very counterintuitive. At this key moment, when you feel all is lost and you could not continue observing and embracing the strong sensations, **demand more.**

MORE?

You’re thinking, “You must be kidding! I can hardly stand this, let alone take an increased dosage.”

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Step 3= Demand More

Demand more! Scream out, if you must, but let your anxiety know you're making a firm request that you want to experience the very worst it can throw at you! The request for more is the most empowering statement you make when in the midst of a full-blown panic attack. It sends a clear and strong statement that you are calling fear's bluff. You are allowing yourself to feel really excited by the whole experience as if it were a roller coaster ride. You are a fully paid-up and willing participant, not a victim. You're asking it to show you more of these unusual bodily sensations you're going through. Now you're actually moving with the fear, not against it. By moving in the same direction as the fearful experience, you end the internal conflict or tug-of-war. **Demanding more places you in a new position of power.** Before you felt like a victim always having to resist and pull back from the fear, but now that you are no longer resisting, the fear has no momentum to develop into a panic attack and is processed out through the body and the mind.

Here are some typical examples of sensations people fear and how they can process that fear:

I feel anxious and my heart is beating fast, could this be a dreaded heart attack? Well if it is then so be it, let's have a big fat heart attack. Better be a thumping good one.

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My throat and chest feel quite tense all of a sudden? OK, this is not a problem;, this is just muscle tension, I am perfectly safe. Go ahead and show me what it's like if my throat and chest feel even tighter.

I feel a bit dizzy, what if I faint? That's fine, I am sitting down now, so go ahead—let's faint if we have to!

I am starting to feel really uncomfortable here in this room. That's ok if I have a panic attack—be my guest, panic away. I am perfectly safe; my body can handle all of these sensations.

Demanding more is a request that fear cannot deliver. You voluntarily move in the same direction as the sensations, and you give no momentum to the fear to create the internal tug of war struggle. It is like throwing down the rope and saying, “Whatever anxiety—ramp it up, let's go! I am no longer playing this game of fear”. This knocks anxiety right on the head, because there's no longer any fuel to drive the campaign of terror. The fuse that was dangerously close to exploding into a full-blown panic attack is extinguished. What's more is that this action calls fear's bluff. Demanding more reveals the truth of the situation—there never really was anything to fear in the first place. It was all an illusion. The panic attack was a dud.

It can sometimes help to demand more in an aggressive manner. If you are alone you can stamp your

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feet and call out to the anxiety. The sensations of anxiety, of course, are unpleasant; nobody's trying to pretend they're enjoyable. But that doesn't have to stop you from fully experiencing them. In fact, you've always fully experienced them, but this time you're a willing participant conducting the experience, not suppressing it. You're stating with confidence, to yourself and your body, that you're capable of experiencing the sensations and any amount of increased anxiety that may come your way, because you know the truth: there's nothing to fear.

Demand more.

Fear doesn't know how to handle this request. It's completely confused by this new response, and has no option but to collapse on itself and dissipate. Fear feeds off fear. **Your previous resistance was igniting a fire of panic and the more you worried, the more fuel you tossed on the fire.** Now you're learning a new approach that extinguishes the panic immediately.

As the fear wanes, silently say to your fear, "Is that the best you can do?" Invite it to come back! "Stay! Have you nothing else to terrify me with?" As it leaves—which it will—wish it well and keep the invitation open for its return. Remember the anxiety is not your enemy. You need to invite the anxiety to return at

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any time in order to eliminate lingering thoughts of an unexpected return.

When done correctly, the results of this approach are instantaneous. You might feel a rush of heat in your chest area and you'll immediately notice the turning point as the parasympathetic nervous system comes slowly into action and restores calm. The brake pedal has been activated. It feels as if you've walked out the other side of fear with a new confidence. There was no abyss, no cliff you went tumbling off. All of it was nothing but a series of physical sensations which you were previously misinterpreting as a threat.

You may notice the fear creeping back, like a fearful thought crossing your mind. Don't worry. This is just the winding-down cycle of the anxiety. Don't let it engage you. Observe it as before, as if you were looking at a cloud passing overhead, and let it go. Remain firm, and continue to experience the sensations. Rest in the knowledge that whatever comes your way, you can handle. Let this be your daily mantra:

I can handle any situation life throws my way.

In the beginning, you'll probably find it hard to believe in yourself enough to demand more, because panic attacks may have eroded some of your self-confidence. This is only natural—you may find yourself asking for more and then immediately running with your hands in the air. Don't let any setbacks worry you.

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Practice and practice. If you don't get a result straight away, keep at it; the more you use this approach, the more you'll see how empowering it is. In time, you'll reach a point where you feel a panic attack arrive and genuinely welcome it with all your mind and body. You'll truly understand that there's nothing to worry about.

Moving with the fear, not against it, eliminates the source of its power. That's the psychological alchemy of turning fear into excitement.

You may think, *"No way! I'm not asking for more panic sensations. Knowing my luck, that's exactly what I'll get, and it will finally push me over the edge and land me feet first in a mental hospital."* You fear that if you do in fact ask for more fear and more anxiety, the request will create more problems for you.

Step 4 = Trust

This is where you need to trust you are safe. Trust yourself. Trust in your own body's ability to handle the situation and all the unusual bodily sensations you might feel. Trust that even if you still feel

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uncomfortable, those sensations will no longer escalate into a state of panic.

Let's take an example and put this into practice before I show you the condensed 21 second version of this approach.

Scenario 1

You're on a train, and you've just sat down. It's been a long day; you're tired and looking forward to sleeping on the journey. The whistle blows and the train doors slam shut with a loud bang. An anxious thought flashes through your mind:

What if I get a panic attack on this train? How will I cope? I won't be able to get off!

It begins. Your chest suddenly feels tight, and you notice your heartbeat increasing. You quickly look around. Are there any friendly faces that might console you? None. The initial symptoms of a panic attack begin. So here we go. Let's look first at the way you may have dealt with this situation in the past.

As your heartbeat increases, you become edgy. You may have learned some breathing techniques, so you

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put them into effect. One of the problems with breathing techniques is that, although they're very useful for reducing general anxiety, the results never seem quick or apparent enough during a moment of panic. Because of that, they're rarely carried through and continued. In addition, it is my experience that many people don't like to focus on their breathing during a panic attack because they feel uncomfortable trying to control it.

So the breathing doesn't seem to be working. Most likely, your next move is to get up and walk around—into the bathroom, for example, where you can be alone. Standing up and walking around makes you feel less trapped. You close the toilet stall door and check to see how you feel.

This feels a little better. It's good to be alone—away from anyone who might witness you in distress and making a fool of yourself. The problem is that you're starting to feel trapped again, and you're running out of places to run. “What if I go back to my seat and people start to notice my distress?” You think to yourself. Another cold flush of fear pulses through you. You reach inside your pocket and pull out your emergency relaxant for panic attacks. This doesn't necessarily have to be a prescription drug; it may be a small bottle of alcohol or even rosary beads. Whatever your last line of defense is, it had better work.

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If not, you'll have to use the ultimate coping strategy—pulling the emergency cord and jumping off the train. This situation, like most panic attacks, is an escalation of panic and an exhaustion of the coping techniques.

Now, let's try the same scenario with your new understanding.

Scenario 2

As you hear the train door slam, the fearful thoughts rise. This time, however, you don't react with terror, but with a simple observation—maybe even slight excitement—because you're going to be presented with a new opportunity to learn more about your panic attacks.

I'm not saying that you aren't going to experience fear—sometimes that's unavoidable. But the difference is that whatever you experience, you're going to throw yourself into it—head first. You're a survivor.

You observe that your heart is pounding faster now, and you notice that your breathing is becoming short and rapid. You decide to keep feeling and embracing all of this 100%. A thought creeps in and tells you to get up, move around, go to the bathroom. You decide not to. You tell yourself that if it gets really intense,

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you might consider the bathroom as a last resort. But for the moment, you're going to ride it out where you are. Most people would never even notice you were in distress, so you don't worry what they might think of you.

You're now in the moment of a panic attack. You're listening to your fearful thoughts and experiencing all the unusual bodily sensations. You're pleased with yourself. You realize you're riding the wave of anxiety, and you haven't even begun your first coping technique. Then it intensifies. You start to feel a deep fear in your stomach as your left arm tingles with pins and needles. You're approaching the climax of high anxiety, and you examine all your options—shout out, escape, or **demand more**.

So that's what you do—you demand more. You demand with firmness that the panic increases so that you can experience the full range of the emotion. A few seconds pass. The panic suddenly intensifies and you ask for it again—then nothing. In fact, things are starting to calm down. Your heart isn't racing like before, and your chest feels somewhat lighter. *"It's coming to an end—great."* Just as you think that thought, there is another burst of anxiety but this time it's weaker. Gradually over the next few minutes, the anxiety fully dissipates and there is no sense of foreboding.

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Now you can really feel confident! You not only got through a panic attack, but you also ran with it and experienced it all the way. You stood your ground, not in an overly aggressive manner, but as an adventurer looking to embrace the full experience. There's no lingering fear of a panic attack returning on your train journey because you're confident that, should one come, you'll ride it out like the last one. You close your eyes and relax confidently into your seat. What you're doing is befriending fear in a non-confrontational manner. You're inviting it into your life and making it yours. You understand it is just a game you play with yourself.

This is a complete U-turn from what we've been previously taught. We're normally told to cope using coping techniques and that, after a significant period of time, you grow out of your anxiety. Bypass that disempowering approach. Go for the finish line. Try the complete reverse—turn your fear into excitement and as you make that mental switch observe how it no longer controls you.

This is by no means a new approach. We can see from the past how this has been applied to many different areas of living a successful life. The ancient Japanese martial arts, such as aikido, use this approach with self-defense. When faced with an attacker, students of these disciplines were taught that

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the greatest defense was never to engage in the first place. Simply observe and walk away. Should an attack ensue after trying the path of non-resistance, students were taught moves, such as hand blocks, to channel the aggressor's energy in a harmless way and flow with the bodily movement. Eventually, the aggressor (after finding himself or herself flat on the ground one too many times) backs off and retreats. The aggressor becomes harmless. The danger is disarmed.

Panic attacks are our own creation—a tug of war we play with ourselves. The fear is driven by overreacting and then pulling away in fear from the anxious bodily sensations. **I want to point out that this approach is not just a process of simply observing anxiety or, to use a popular term, “floating” with the anxiety.** The method of simply observing the panic/anxiety has been addressed in other books.

Simply observing the anxiety is like sitting immobile on the fence. It's the stance of neutrality, but you may have noticed in the past that being neutral toward the anxiety often isn't enough. To really eliminate panic attacks for good, you need an additional element. You need movement—movement that's aligned with the aroused bodily sensations of anxiety. Demanding more with passion and excitement creates the internal movement you need.

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Anxiety isn't logical. Look at the fears that go through your mind—they neither have a basis in validity, nor do they follow reason or structure. Panic attacks are flat-out illogical; they don't make sense. There's no threat, and yet you still fear the sensations. What you need is a paradoxical solution. In this case, that means doing the opposite of what the logical mind has tried to do all along by fighting the anxiety. So to summarize, here are the four steps we've discussed so far:

1. *Observe*

When panic arises, wherever you may be, simply start to **observe it**. Don't try to avoid or suppress your bodily sensations.

2. *Embrace*

Embrace and accept the experience fully. Feel all the sensations as they course through your body. Don't label the sensations as good or bad.

3. *Demand More*

When you feel that the panic is going to run out of control, and when your confidence in your ability to observe the fear wanes, do the opposite of what you have been doing to date. **Demand more**. Demand more of the unusual sensations and ride them out.

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4. *Trust*

Trust that you're safe. Trust your body can handle it. Trust that even if you still feel uncomfortable, those sensations will no longer escalate into a state of panic.

Now that you have an understanding of the four steps to stop a panic attack, you need a quick and easy way to implement them. The 21 Second Countdown condenses the four steps into a simple and easy-to-remember exercise that you can do anywhere.

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Step 1: Observe. When the bodily sensations you associate with a panic attack become apparent, begin by **observing** the sensations as they build.

“Strange, I notice my chest is feeling tight and my heartbeat is starting to increase.” “Could this be the start of a panic attack?”

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Get excited by these sensations as they activate your nervous system. You can genuinely feel excited because for the first time you are going to be directing and controlling this experience.

Step 2: Embrace. Allow all the sensations, regardless of how unpleasant they are, to flow around your body. The rug of control is being pulled from under your feet by your old friend panic, but this time you are grabbing ahold of it—pulling it close in a tight **embrace** and dancing with it! Give panic a cartoon characteristic if you like, maybe a small duck with big clumsy feet.

Step 3: Demand More. Now tell the panic that you are not going to waste time with any of its idle threats and that it has 21 seconds to initiate the panic attack that it threatens. 21 seconds to do its worst! You are not just telling the panic this but **demanding it**. 21 seconds to get as bad as it is going to get, but if after 21 seconds nothing has happened, it must stop making empty threats.

Whatever the issue is that you fear, it must happen within that 21 second time frame.

-If your heart is going to explode, then it has 21 seconds to do so.

-If you are going to stop breathing, then you have 21 seconds to do so.

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-If you are going to faint—21 seconds! But absolutely no more time than that.

By setting a specific time frame you turn the table and establish clear boundaries of control. In short, you call panic's bluff. If it were a poker game, you would be asking panic to show its hand.

This works because it places you in charge of the experience instead of getting tossed around by the sensations of panic and anxiety. It is a very subtle switch in perception that enables you to re-establish control.

You say to yourself *“I am not going to waste any more time and energy worrying about panic attacks. I've had enough. I am going to be generous and give panic 21 seconds to get as bad as it's going to get, but if after 21 seconds are up and nothing has happened, then sorry, but the opportunity has officially passed.”*

Now start counting down from 21—but nice and slowly, don't rattle it off as fast as you can. Really tease it out like you did when you were a child playing a game and you never wanted to reach zero. Teasing it out is the key because it allows you to feel generous; you are really giving panic every chance possible to do its worst.

The 21-Second Countdown

Deep down you know there is really nothing to fear and that is the ace hidden up your sleeve.

To really tease it out, when you get around number 5, break the last few into fractions.

5.....

4.....

3.....

2...and three quarters...

2...and half.....

2.....

1...and three quarters... (last chance)

1...and a half..... (I really cant wait any longer)

1.....

0.

Sorry, too late, we've run out of time.

By not rushing through the countdown you will feel your confidence soar because you are demonstrating

The 21-Second Countdown

real control and authority over the feared panic attack. You have been as generous as you could be but it has become apparent that this is a false alarm; there is no threat and you are now going to go back about your business.

Step 4: Trust. Now you can really **trust** that there is no threat and that you are safe. Incredibly, you have demanded that a panic attack should happen and it did not. You demanded that the sensations you feared most should do their worst, and... nothing. You are still alive and well and in one piece. You can feel really good because you have shattered the illusion of threat that was hanging over you like a dark cloud. You can see that the panic attack never had anything of substance to ever threaten you with in the first place. The game is up and panic was bluffing.

Yes, your body may still feel on edge but you trust now that it will no longer escalate into a state of panic. That new trust and confidence in your body's ability to handle the anxiety will end the occurrence of panic attacks. Your fear of fear ends here and now.

How often should you do the technique? Do it as often as you feel the need. For some people just once may be enough, whereas others may have to do it a few times to get a result. It also depends on

The 21-Second Countdown

the situation you are in. If, for example, you are in a situation that lasts a period of time (e.g., driving or flying), you may need to repeat the technique several times until you really start to feel safe.

What if you complete the countdown and still feel very much on edge?

The goal of this technique IS NOT to try and stop the uncomfortable bodily sensations you feel (they will dissipate on their own). **The goal is to stop your fearful reaction to those sensations.** You are learning to really trust your body's ability to handle all these uncomfortable sensations; you no longer have to get upset by them. You allow them to be present as long as they like because they do not threaten you. That new trust and confidence in your body ends the fear of fear. When you end the fear of fear, you quickly end panic attacks.

So do not feel upset if you still feel uncomfortable after completing the countdown. It is very normal to still feel on edge. Once you start getting your mind out of the way (by not overreacting to the sensations), nature will take its course and your body will soon then return to a state of calm.

The 21-Second Countdown

Do the technique with a sense of humor! It is important to add an element of playfulness to this technique in order to make it really effective. For example, you can joke with the anxiety as you speak to it and be very comical when you are counting down. As suggested earlier, you may find it helpful to visualize the anxiety as a harmless cartoon character, telling you in a squeaky voice about all the things that could go wrong. By bringing humor into play, you start to lighten the seriousness of the anxiety. Humor enables you to detach from the fear and rise above it. Everyone has their own unique sense of humor, so find an approach that works for you.

What if you can't do the full countdown, e.g., you are talking with other people?

In a situation where you can't afford to take the time to do the 21 second countdown, you can do the short version of the technique. The short version is to get excited by the sensations and then **Demand More**.

Say for example you are at dinner talking to some friends and you start to feel the beginnings of a panic attack. Fire off a quick thought and tell the panic/anxiety to get worse. Demand the thing you fear most should happen right now. That request for more is in essence what the countdown is all about—challenging the illusion anxiety creates. The technique is of course more effective when done in full as

The 21-Second Countdown

outlined above but there are occasions when it is not possible to get a moment to yourself and in such situations use the short cut and simply DEMAND MORE!

The next step... It is normal that after doing the *21 Second Countdown* your general anxiety level is still going to be elevated due to the activity of your sympathetic nervous system. After the *21 Second Countdown* you can then apply the *7 Minute Exercise* (in the next section of the book) to engage the parasympathetic nervous system, which will bring your general anxiety level right down and make you feel more relaxed and calm. It is not compulsory to always do the *7 Minute Exercise* right after the *21 Second Countdown*, as circumstance does not always allow for it, but I do recommend you perform it if you have the opportunity, as it really helps to ground you in a feeling of calm. You can skip ahead to learn that exercise right now if you are in a rush, but I do advise you to read on below as you will get insights into using this technique in very specific circumstances, like driving, flying, public speaking, and cases of agoraphobia.

I have been teaching this approach since 2001 and its success in helping people stop their panic attacks has been an incredible thing to be a part of. As *Panic Away* became more widespread, I started to get several queries about the similarities between this technique and *paradoxical intention*, which forms part of a therapy called logotherapy created by the late Dr. Viktor Frankl. After some research I discovered that, not only was one of the world's greatest psychiatrists of our time prescribing the exact same approach

The 21-Second Countdown

for treating panic attacks, but that there was also a wealth of clinical evidence based on his paradoxical approach of treating anxiety.² I share this with you so that you can take comfort in the fact that the approach you are learning here has a proven track record and is backed by scientific evidence.

If someone were to ask me what the key difference is between those who are cured of panic attacks and those who are not, I would say; **those who are cured are no longer suffering from a fear of fear.** They see their bodily sensations as merely sensations and not something to which they should overreact.

Here's another interesting way of looking at this approach. The trick to ending panic attacks is to *want* to have one.

You've heard the saying "**what you resist persists.**" Well, that saying applies perfectly to fear. If you resist a situation or experience because of fear, then the fear around that issue will persist. How do you stop resisting? You move towards the anxiety and transform it into positive feelings of excitement. In essence,

² Turner, Ralph M.; Ascher, L. Michael "Controlled Comparison of Progressive Relaxation, Stimulus Control, and Paradoxical Intention Therapies for Insomnia." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. Vol 47(3), Jun 1979, 500-508.

Ascher LM, Turner RM. A Comparison of Two Methods for the Administration of Paradoxical Intention. *Behav Res Ther*. 1980;18(2):121-126.

The 21-Second Countdown

this means that if you voluntarily seek out a panic attack on a daily basis, you can't have one. You may not realize it, but you've always decided to panic. You've made the choice by thinking, *"This is beyond my control"* or *"Something terrible is about to happen to my body because I can feel X, Y, and Z."*

To use a visual analogy, imagine that having a panic attack is like standing on a cliff's edge. It seems like the anxiety pushes you closer to falling off the edge. Each unusual sensation confirms that something terrible is about to happen, and you feel yourself being edged closer and closer to the abyss. There are two options open to you in this scenario.

You can turn around and fight your way back to safe ground with coping techniques and strategies you've learned previously. You might seek reassurance from a friend or take a dose of medication to help you feel safer. Basically, you fight against it. Or. . .

You bravely jump!

To be really free of the fear, you must metaphorically jump. You must jump off the cliff that scares you so much, and jump into all the things that you fear most. How do you jump? You jump by demanding more.

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Your guaranteed safety is the fact that a panic attack will never harm you physically. That's a medical fact. You're safe—the sensations are wild, but no harm will come to you. Your heart is racing, but no harm will come to you. The jump becomes nothing more than a two-foot drop! You have all the safety harnesses you need, because in reality you never had anything to fear in the first place. The abyss that had lain before you was an illusion. Trust that medical knowledge. Feel assured by it. Think of all the attacks you've had to date and you've still come out at the other end.

So now you're going to treat the anxious situations differently. You'll regularly seek out the panic attack like an extreme sports enthusiast. This process of seeking out the anxiety applies when you feel yourself bang in the middle of a panic episode, but it also helps to do it when you're feeling fine and relaxed.

Begin right now, and continue for the rest of the day. Go out actually hoping for a panic attack! It sounds a bit mad, but try it. Feel how empowering this new thinking is for you. Until now, you've dreaded the arrival of an attack, but now you're dancing with the idea of it, knowing that you can implement the *21 Second Countdown* as soon as you feel anxiety creep in. The fear of a panic attack has nowhere to latch onto when you participate and purposefully move towards it.

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Sometimes people write to me and say that they like the approach, but when they tried it they did not get results. In fact, it made them feel a bit more anxious. These people want to know what they're doing wrong.

Why Doesn't It Work for Some People?

When people can't get the *21 Second Countdown* to work, it's inevitably an issue of trust. They go only halfway and then retreat. They try, but if after a few attempts the anxiety hasn't decreased as quickly as they would have liked, they revert to old coping mechanisms to try to shut down the sensations of panic.

Remember, when using the *21 Second Countdown*, you're NOT trying to shut down the sensations or the fear. Your first and foremost objective is to experience them in their entirety and transform the fear into a feeling of excitement. Of course, that's not what you really want. Deep down, you really want it to end, but to get to that point, you have to make up your mind to really go through the anxiety and out the other side. This is the paradox of ending panic attacks which Dr. Frankl called paradoxical intention—willing the irrational fear on in order to end it. To make this work you really have to give yourself to it 100%.

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What if the Panic Gets Worse and Worse?

The anxiety will not get increasingly worse to the point of no return. Anxiety can't continually increase. It will wane, and when it does, you're psychologically in a completely different place. You're now in a position of power. Before, it was a menacing storm surrounding you, and you tried to shelter yourself from it by bracing tightly. Each time the storm of panic passed, you felt lucky to have survived it. Now it's different, because you control the experience and allow it to move through you. This enables you to process the storm of panic in seconds. This new position of power makes you feel more in control and confident because you've actually encouraged the panic to do its worst—and nothing happened. You're alive and well.

The new confidence you get from the *21 Second Countdown* enables you to win. When you stop fearing the sensations, the panic attacks end. Your life now opens up in front of you as you become more fearless. Bear in mind each individual is different. Some will eliminate their panic attacks faster than others. Do not get upset or disappointed with yourself if it is not happening as fast as you would like. In my experience the only people who do not reach their goal of eliminating the panic are the ones who give

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up too soon. This approach of demanding more and turning fear into excitement takes a bit of bravery initially, but the rewards are well worth it!

Examples of the 21 Second Countdown in Real-life Situations

I want to give you some examples of how the *21 Second Countdown* can be applied to various real-life situations. You may have a specific situation that causes you to panic, and you're unsure of how the technique can be applied appropriately. Hopefully, the examples will clarify such issues. If your specific situation isn't discussed, I'm sure you'll be able to get a good enough understanding to adapt it for your particular problem area.

Driving Anxiety

One of the more common questions I'm asked is how to apply the *21 Second Countdown* to cope with anxiety while driving. People have many different fears in this area, ranging from fear of being caught in traffic to crossing waterway bridges. Often the anxiety stems from a fear of being trapped in the vehicle in gridlock traffic or losing control of the vehicle and causing a collision.

Needless to say, even though they may have been battling a driving phobia for many years, almost all of the people I've consulted with have not actually had any of these mishaps occur. Let's look at the primary fear: having an accident due to the distractions of an anxiety attack while driving.

Most people work themselves into a state of high anxiety even before they've pulled out of their driveways. They imagine scenes of causing ten-car collisions on the highway because they "freaked out" and hit another vehicle.

If you have such concerns, the first thing to do is review your driving history. Have you been a reckless driver in the past? Do you have a history of bad driving? Most phobic drivers actually have clean driving records and have never even been in a minor road incident. Anxious drivers are not a deadly hazard on

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the road; in fact, they can be a lot more vigilant than many ordinary drivers who, after a long day in the office, are virtually asleep at the wheel.

As we discussed previously when looking at the biology of anxiety, by virtue of their conditions anxious drivers have a high level of sensory alertness. This level of alertness keeps them aware of potential hazards and focused on the task of driving—not daydreaming, chatting, or rooting around in the glove compartment. This, of course, does not suggest that anxious driving is the ideal way to commute. But I believe it's important to make this point because so many chastise themselves for being anxious in their cars. If you're generally a good driver, before you set out in your car take confidence in that fact, and reaffirm it to yourself. Acknowledging and reaffirming that you're a capable driver will go some way toward alleviating this concern. That self-assurance, along with the *21 Second Countdown* for Drivers (below), will help you return to being the confident driver you once were.

The second major concern of most phobic drivers is the fear of being trapped in the car in some manner. By this, I mean being caught in traffic, on busy three-lane highways, on long bridges, or even stopped at red lights. When allowed to, your mind will run away with this fear and imagine all kinds of deadly

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scenarios where you feel cornered or trapped in your vehicle with no assistance available should you experience a major panic attack.

The important thing here is to curb these fears before they take root, by offering yourself viable solutions to any of these scenarios and not letting your mind trick you into believing there's a trap ahead. Give it some thought. Are there really any situations, such as the ones described above, where you're truly trapped with no means of escape?

No, of course there aren't.

Eventually, traffic always moves; it doesn't remain gridlocked forever. There's flow, and there's always an exit. This may mean figuring out the exit for yourself, but never let these thoughts corner you into thinking that there's no escape. When you counteract these fears with logical solutions, you undermine the control that fear holds over you. You begin to see the bluff it's playing to keep you petrified of what could potentially happen out there in the traffic.

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Your mind may rebel and come up with the worst possible scenario that you may get “stuck in”—but again, is this really the terrifying trap you imagined? Be careful not to let these thoughts trap your thinking. Every minute of the day, people’s cars break down in traffic. These drivers have no option but to put on the hazard lights and leave the vehicle. It’s not going anywhere. There you are, and there’s an exit, albeit an extreme one; however, by using my technique, it never needs to come to that. In fact, you’re going to learn how driving can actually be an enjoyable experience once again.

The 21 Second Countdown for Drivers

I’m going to show you how to apply the *21 Second Countdown* to driving scenarios. In this case, we’ll look at defusing the panic attack while driving a car. It’s exactly the same procedure I described above, except an extra degree of caution is needed. I’ll explain.

I suggest that you begin by taking your car out on a practice run, possibly at night or on a Sunday when there’s less traffic. Drive a route that you feel anxious about; perhaps go beyond your safety zone or drive over a bridge. If you feel very nervous, begin with a smaller test. The important thing, though, is to challenge yourself with a route that causes you at least some degree of concern. You won’t be long into the

Driving Anxiety

journey before the anxiety starts to manifest itself. This anxiety may be low level, but if driving really is a problem, it will gradually manifest itself into feelings of panic.

Steps 1 and 2. As you feel that panic arise, begin by observing and embracing the sensations. Get excited by the unusual sensations. Feel your hands on the steering wheel and begin to tap your fingers on the wheel as if you were an orchestra conductor, conducting the symphony of sensations around your body. Each time you tap your fingers you control and move the anxiety around your body. It can really help to start singing out loud at this stage, as singing releases pent up emotion around your throat and chest area.

Step 3. Once you feel the sensations are peaking into a state of panic you can begin the countdown. Tell the panic that you are not going to waste your energy with any of its idle threats and that it has 21 seconds to initiate the panic attack right now in the car, screaming kids and all! 21 seconds to do its worst! You are **demanding it**. If you want to pull over when you do this countdown then do so, but you can also do this while driving as long as you keep focused on the road and drive at a safe speed. 21, 20, 19, 18, 17, 16, etc...

When the countdown is complete you will feel a sense of relief and can relax knowing that you have

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nothing to worry about. You can continue on with your journey in the knowledge that if the anxiety rises again, you can take the same steps to reduce and eliminate it.

Your training is to take the car on a test run in the hope of having an anxiety attack. That's your goal. Even before you've left home, you're chasing the anxiety by purposefully setting out on the journey. This is a turn of events; because driving makes you feel anxious, you normally prefer not to even think about it.

The practice drives can be done with another person at first, but after more practice, I recommend doing it alone—that's where you find true independence and freedom from fear. If you always practice with another individual, then you may form an idea that it's your passenger who is letting you feel safe, and not your newfound confidence.

You need to be cautious about certain things while practicing. Ensure you're driving at a safe speed, and continue to maintain focus on the road and other traffic. If you feel light-headed and faint, pull over and continue with the technique in a parked position; otherwise, you're perfectly safe. You're safe because you're actually in a heightened state of awareness, and if you maintain a safe speed, you're no danger to yourself or other drivers. You're safe because the unusual sensations are nothing more than that—

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sensations; they'll cause you no harm. The thoughts that terrify you are mere illusions.

When you return home after a successful drive, it can help to keep track of your performance in a diary—call it your *driving diary*. Keeping a diary will reaffirm how well you're progressing, and should you have a bad day on the road, you'll be able to return to the diary and see that you are indeed making real progress. Try to affirm to yourself how well you've been doing. We can have one great week and then one bad day, and suddenly it's as if the other six good days never existed! So always try to focus on the success, and it will grow and expand in your life. This applies to all situations where you're trying to overcome your anxiety.

The *21 Second Countdown* will give you the ability to move into the fear of any road situation. Moving toward the fear cancels out the force or impact of the anxiety. This takes a little practice—but, as I say, a few test runs during times of little traffic are best.

To finish, I want to give you some affirmations you can use while driving. Repeat these silently or out loud, and they'll help relax and center your mind, keeping you focused on driving well.

Driving Anxiety

I am a competent driver and always arrive at my destination safely.

I am alert and in full control while driving.

I can handle any situation I meet on the road.

Case Study:

Lindsey's Fear of Driving

My fear of driving was crippling my life. Driving on busy roads, especially highways, would frequently send me into panic attacks. It would begin with a niggling thought, usually about some road horror story I'd heard recently. Then my body would respond with rapid heartbeats, shallow breathing—the whole shooting match. The very fact that my body was getting nervous would then trigger the fear that I was going to have one of my infamous panic attacks. It wasn't uncommon for me to have to call my husband at times to come rescue me!

Giving up driving wasn't possible. I have children to take to school every weekday, and there's really no other way to get them there but for me to drive. I'm sure they would have loved it if I turned around to them and said, "Sorry, kids, no school today. Your mother is too afraid to take you." But that, of course, was not an option. Every morning,

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I would do battle with this fear, and often it felt like I was losing ground. It was draining me and causing numerous sleepless nights as I thought about where I might have to drive the following day.

There are two ways to get to the school. One is on the highway—or there's the other, a much longer, roundabout route that's really a complete waste of time. Depending on how I was feeling, I would leave either extra early for the long route, if I was feeling a bit jittery—or around the normal time, as most other mothers in the neighborhood, if I was feeling brave. It even got to the point where my children were noticing.

“Long way today. Mummy mustn't be feeling great.”

Something had to be done. I began researching on the Internet and came across Panic Away. It took me a little while to fully grasp what was being taught but after a few readings, something must have clicked. I think it began with me losing my temper with this fear. I actually, embarrassingly enough, yelled out, “Bring it on!” like they do in the movies. “If you're going to terrorize me for the rest of my driving life, then come on and do your worst. 21 Seconds, buddy!”

That felt really scary and surprisingly invigorating, like I was getting a weight off my chest. I left the next morning

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with the same attitude. And for the first time in years, I found myself driving up the road with a sense of calm resignation. When I examine it now, it was resignation to the fact that if I had the “big bad” panic attack I always feared, I would simply have it! “This thing is not going to kill me. So if you’re not going to kill me, then, by heck, you’d better let me take the kids to school and let me get on with all the other things I have to do today.” This train of thought later developed into “If this thing isn’t going to kill me, then it damn well better back off.”

Wow, what a turnabout! Something inside really had clicked. Yes, I felt the same tingles and the same strange palpitations for weeks after, but now I really didn’t care. My attitude did a complete U-turn, from being terrified by the slightest sensation to completely excited by the sensations and having fun with them. It’s almost like I got sick and tired of the panic attack tantrum and was not going to tolerate the fears anymore. I would give it 21 seconds to do its worst and then move on. I’m not sure if this is the right interpretation of the solution but this is what I took from it, and it really works for me.

I now drive with confidence and with only a distant memory of being scared. I’m not going to say it’s totally stress free—the noise, the traffic, etc.—but I guess that just means I’m back to the same level with every other driver out there on the road.

Agoraphobia

Agoraphobia is linked to the experience of panic attacks. This is the fear of open spaces or of being in crowded, public places like shopping markets. It's associated with leaving a safe zone, such as the home.

Because of feeling vulnerable, people who experience this fear often suffer from panic attacks in these “open” situations. It's true to say that many people who have regular panic attacks experience different degrees of agoraphobia. Some have a lingering background anxiety about being away from home should they experience a panic attack. Others are so immobilized by this fear that they find it very difficult to leave their homes for even a short period.

The thinking behind agoraphobia usually follows the line that, were a panic attack to occur, who would look after the person and how would he or she get the needed assistance and reassurance? The vulnerability grows from the feeling that once agoraphobia victims are caught in the anxiety, they're suddenly unable to look after themselves and are therefore at the mercy of the place in which they find themselves and the strangers around them. In its extreme form, agoraphobia can lead to a situation where people become housebound for numerous years. Please note that this is by no means hopeless; I always need to reinforce the fact that something only becomes hopeless once the person really believes that to

Agoraphobia

be the case. *Panic Away* has taken many people out of extreme agoraphobia and into a full and active life again.

To begin with, the primary issue to address is belief in the safe zone. To clarify, when I talk about the “safe zone,” I refer to the zone where the person believes panic attacks don’t occur, or at least where they occur infrequently. Because comfort is found there, it’s where the person tends to spend more and more time. **The safe zone from anxiety is a myth sustained by the mind.** The mind has developed a habit of thinking that dictates the safe zone is the only place to feel secure.

If agoraphobia is an issue for you, watch as your mind comes up with reasons why it believes only a certain area is safe and another is not. Those reasons range from being near people you trust to having familiar physical surroundings to reassure you.

The reality of anxiety is that there’s no such thing as a safe zone. There’s nothing life-threatening about a panic attack, and therefore sitting at home is the same as sitting under the stars on a desert island. Of course, your mind immediately rushes to tell you that a desert island is a ridiculous place to be because there are no hospitals, no tranquilizers, no doctors, NO SAFETY.

Agoraphobia

Review your previous experiences of panic attacks. Aren't you still here, alive and well, after all those attacks during which you were convinced you were going to die?

You may have, on occasion, been driven to the hospital, where they did medicate you to calm you down—but do you really believe that you wouldn't have survived were it not for the drugs? You would have. If the same bout of anxiety had occurred on this desert island, it would have passed as well, even if you were all alone. Yes, when it comes to conditions that need medical attention—such as asthma, diabetes, and a whole litany of other conditions—then having medical aid nearby is a big asset. But no doctor in the world would tell someone with anxiety that there are only specific safe zones in which he or she can move.

I know more than anyone how terrifying it can feel to move out of your safe zone as the feeling of fear wells up inside, so I don't wish to sound harsh. This course is not about chastising people for their behaviors. It's a way of looking together at solutions and seeing through the myths that form prison walls. The goal is to enable you to return to a richer and more meaningful life. I also realize that people around you can't understand why a trip to the store would cause you such discomfort. You'll have to forgive them and try not to be upset by their lack of understanding of your problem.

Agoraphobia

If an individual such as a partner or family member hasn't had a similar anxiety issue, that person may often find it hard to understand and empathize with what you're going through. I'm sure you've been dragged out of the house numerous times against your will, kicking and screaming. This can then lead to tensions and arguments, and it's upsetting because it can make you feel less understood by those around you. People around agoraphobics often simply try what they feel is best. If you see that their intentions are well-meaning (although often misguided), then you'll be able to relate to them better and help soothe any potential conflicts.

There's one thing I'm sure you'll agree with: the only person who will get you out of agoraphobic thinking is you. **These are your thoughts that are creating the prison walls, and only you can begin to bring those walls down.** Dealing with long-term agoraphobia is a slow process at first. But once the results start happening, it moves faster and faster until you reach a point where you find it hard to believe that going out was ever such a difficult task.

Agoraphobia

Case Study:

Sylvia's Agoraphobia

My use of the 21-7 Technique was really quite simple. I see the technique as a move out of a life of restriction into one of freedom and confidence. I was housebound for five years. I could function to a certain level because I had a husband and children to do things for me, but inside I was really dying. I was angry with myself for not being brave, and I felt trapped by a phobia that would last to the end of my days. It's quite depressing, really, when you can't find a solution.

My problem stemmed from a general anxiety that spiraled into a fear of being caught outside by a panic attack. This meant that being anywhere outside home made me extremely anxious. Even walking to the end of the road could be a problem.

I'm not sure how this phobia got so bad, but it wasn't until I reached rock bottom that I decided I had to stop living this way. My marriage was suffering, and I'm not sure how much longer it would have lasted had I not tackled the agoraphobia myself. I needed a solution.

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My husband had been very supportive, but I knew he mourned the loss of the confident woman he married years ago. When I look back now, I see I was living an empty shell of a life. I had made myself a prisoner—not of my house, but of my mind. My thoughts were the prison wardens threatening me that, were I to attempt to break out, I would suffer the consequences. It turns out that after the breakout, the consequences were only freedom!

It was anger more than anything that drove me to do the research and eventually buy Panic Away. I read the material and was initially not that excited. I think I was looking for a solution that would not involve any work and one that would enable me to erase all memories of fears that I had—a magic pill. After reading it a few more times, I put it aside and didn't come back to it until I had really reached my wit's end.

The first time I decided to use the technique was on a shopping trip. I'd been planning to purchase curtains for some time and really wanted to pick them out myself. I arrived at the shopping mall with my husband, scared but also excited as today was going to be different. I could feel it. I began by simply observing and talking to the fear, it as if it were a troublesome five-year-old.

When the thought of an impending panic attack arose, I actually caught myself starting the panic cycle. I was about to tell myself, "I'm going to die if I don't get home." That was exactly the kind of thought that kept me prisoner all the

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time. What nonsense. I made a quick U-turn and said, “No, you come on! Come on, panic, let’s have it. Let’s have the best you got—I’ll give you 21 seconds to send me into a complete panic, come on!” 21, 20, 19, 18, etc.

“Come on, then, with the panic and the dying, etc... I haven’t got all day.”

3.....2.....1.....

Nothing.

A bubble burst there and then. I was now the schoolteacher keeping the unruly kids (my thoughts) under my control. This was empowering. I finished the trip without a problem, returned home, and celebrated with my husband.

My complete recovery wasn’t immediate. It took several more trips, along with some major setbacks, before I really moved into my own stride. I would soon begin to wake in the morning and actually think about where I would like to go that day. Before long, I was traveling away from home on my own. I was a woman released from a prison.

I hope I can inspire other readers, who may experience something similar, that the most important thing to remember is that there’s hope. Don’t let those thoughts trap you into a corner of your mind that says this is the only place you can be safe. That’s not true. That’s simply not true.

Fear of Flying

Flying is often an anxious experience for the average person, so it's understandable that it poses a difficult challenge for a person with high anxiety and frequent panic attacks.

I'm going to demonstrate how to apply the *21 Second Countdown* to conquer a fear of flying—so you'll feel confident and safe within yourself while flying both long and short distances.

Most people who suffer from panic attacks generally don't fear a mechanical failure in the aircraft, but rather a failure within themselves (i.e., an out-of-control episode of sheer panic while flying). This is because people who experience panic attacks feel like they're walking around with an internal bomb that could go off at any moment, sending them into a downward spiral of panic. If this “internal bomb” goes off in a safe place, such as the home, it's much easier to deal with because that environment is a safe zone in the person's mind. Being thirty thousand feet in the air creates the dilemma of not feeling safe and comfortable in the environment. An element of claustrophobia also often manifests itself with fear of flying. The person experiencing the anxiety frequently feels a need for more open space or somewhere to hide and be alone, away from other people.

Fear of Flying

If you're affected by a fear of flying, your initial attitude when you book your flight is important. Be excited that you have this opportunity. Remind yourself that while on the plane, you'll have new techniques on hand to help you overcome your fear and enable you to fly to far away destinations. Don't worry—you'll be perfectly safe on board.

Often, a carefree flight begins the night before. Try to ensure that you get some good rest before your departure. Fatigue can cause excess stress. On the day of the flight organize your schedule as best as possible, ensuring there's no hassle getting to the airport, passing through customs, etc. You can do this by giving yourself plenty of time. There's no point in adding more stress to an already nervous trip simply because you have to rush through the airport at the last minute.

As you board the plane, reaffirm the fact that should the anxiety manifest itself, it won't damage you. As you've always done in the past, you'll move through a period of anxiety unharmed, and being in an airplane doesn't mean that you're in a situation where these thoughts don't apply. So here's your *new* approach to flying.

Fear of Flying

You board the plane, not in the hope that you'll feel relaxed and calm, but in the hope that you *will* experience the anxiety and have an opportunity to process it.

As always, the real trick to making this approach fully effective is to completely throw yourself into the experience. If you hold a thought that all feelings or sensations of anxiety are bad, then that will only terrify you more and make you feel less positive about flying. Allow yourself to feel anxious and expect you will probably feel anxious some time before the flight.

Capt. Tom Bunn of the SOAR fear of flying course recommends anxious flyers should not hide their anxiety from the crew and to, in fact, request a short meeting with the pilot during boarding. He suggests that just a simple hello and a few words with the pilot can erase a large percentage of the fearful flyer's anxiety.

Now take your seat and if you're not feeling any of the familiar anxious sensations, ask them to make themselves felt while the rest of the passengers board. If the sensations are there, you want them to reveal themselves. You can do this because you're not hiding or running away from them. You're not sitting in your seat praying that they don't appear. Remember how you reacted before when they started becoming

Fear of Flying

apparent? Most likely, you started to get anxious and thought about how being on a plane was the last place in the world you wanted to be. Those thoughts grew in momentum until you scared yourself witless, and this was even before the main cabin door was closed.

If, on the other hand, you feel nothing alarming, that's fine. Begin to distract yourself with a magazine, a book, or music. But, to be sure, check your feelings regularly to see if there's anything anxious lingering in the background.

By expecting that you may feel anxious, you place yourself under less pressure. There is a voice inside us that, when alerted to a potential panic attack, screams one of two things:

Please, God, not now. I can't cope with this here. Red alert!

. . . or the positive and empowering

There you are. I was expecting you to show up. Well, show me what you've got. I'm ready, waiting and excited. You have got 21 seconds.

So if you feel the beginnings of a panic attack, that's fine. You were never trying to run away from it; in

Fear of Flying

fact, you were hoping it would emerge so you could move through it.

The more you really demand to have an attack during the flight, the more empowered and confident you'll feel in yourself. It can sometimes help to become a bit emotional with the fear when you demand it to show itself, because this helps the emotions to release and flow. You may experience a hot flush when this happens.

It is expected to experience a rush of adrenaline on takeoff; notice that it has a wavelike effect. It courses through your body—and if you pay close attention, you'll feel it pass quickly, in twenty or thirty seconds. Nothing to fear here. After it passes, confidence returns—until the next wave comes, and the next, until eventually you notice the pattern. And, by not reacting, the effect on you is nothing more than bodily sensations minus the panic.

Once the plane reaches cruising altitude and you have processed the initial takeoff anxiety, you can do the *7 Minute Exercise*. The purpose of this exercise, (which you will learn in the next section) is to drop your general anxiety right down to a comfortable level and enable you to relax into the flight. You will probably find it hard to sleep, but do try and relax into it as much as possible and ensure you stay well-hydrated by

Fear of Flying

drinking plenty of water. Drinking water during your flight will also ward off fatigue and jetlag when you reach your destination.

Finally, if you feel very anxious about an upcoming flight and it's playing heavily on your mind, here are some extra tips to help you feel more confident about the trip:

- If you're not taking any prescription relaxants, consider visiting your doctor and explaining your situation. Even if you never use it, a small prescription of Xanax, for example, is useful. In fact, I recommend simply having the tablets in your carry-on luggage. This way, you can reason with yourself that if you do experience uncomfortable sensations, you can always use the pills to help you calm down. Just knowing that you have a crutch in these situations goes a long way to quieting those anxious thoughts days before the flight.
- If you are doing several flights one after the other, see if it is possible to arrange a sleep-over in one of the destinations to allow yourself to rest before continuing the journey. Being well-rested makes flying less stressful.
- Learn about how safe flying is. Sign up for a free fear of flying e-course where Capt. Tom Bunn will

Fear of Flying

share information and about flight safety, turbulence and other helpful tips to ease flying anxiety.

www.panicaway.com/flying

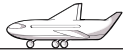
Case Study:

Stephen's Fear of Flying

Until I experienced my first panic attack, I had flown for many years without any fear whatsoever. After that first panic attack—which, incidentally, happened while I was attending a church service—my attitude toward flying changed dramatically. Never mind being in an airplane crossing the Atlantic Ocean; for fear of a panic attack, I was now becoming concerned about simply being away from home. I noticed how I started to create excuses in order to avoid flying. I would convince my girlfriend that holidays at home were much more enjoyable, and there really was no need to have to fly off to foreign destinations.

A couple of years later, I changed jobs, and part of my new responsibilities entailed taking regular flights. This became a big source of stress for me. I would hardly sleep the night before a flight—and then, after managing to force myself on board, I would crack into the booze to help ease my nerves. I was arriving at my destinations slightly drunk, tired, and

Fear of Flying



in no position to do a proper day's work. Something had to give.

I read about Panic Away on a discussion forum and decided to see if it would help with what was now my chronic fear of flying. I had only a few days to go before flying again and was really looking for a mind miracle. The morning of the flight arrived, and I set off nervously for the airport, armed with my small carry-on luggage and the new panic survival skills in my head. The technique made sense to me on paper, but would it “fly” in a real-life situation?

I sat in my seat at the back of the plane and scanned internally to see how I was feeling. Yes, I was scared. That was fine. I was told to expect that. The plane taxied out on the runway, and, as usual, I felt a little more anxious. The funny thing is, I really know when a bout of panic is about to begin. My thoughts seem to get faster, my eyes start to dart around the plane, and every little movement or sound distracts me. I had a small bottle of alcohol, and I wasn't sure if I should down it in one gulp as usual or try the new technique.

I must have gotten that kind of excitement soldiers get before they leap over the trench into battle. I remember crying out (in my thoughts) to the anxiety to come and get me—“DO YOUR WORST.” I sat upright in my seat and awaited the onslaught. I was abandoning myself to the fear in a courageous way. There was a rush of adrenaline, but it didn't feel out of control. Because I was the one who called out for this experience, rather than the waves of fear drowning me,

Fear of Flying

I felt I was surfing them, riding above them excitedly, not suffocating under them. I did the 21 Second Countdown, took a break for a few minutes and did it again when I felt another rush of anxiety. As I had read, the fear was moving in wave formation throughout my body and I felt I was somehow burning through it. Maybe this is what processing fear feels like? After the rush was over, I felt exhilarated. I felt brave, a childlike bravery I haven't felt in many years.

That, and the flights that followed, went wonderfully to plan. After several more flights, I began not to worry so much about the flight the previous night. I started to trust that I would deal with any situation I came across. This is not to say I'm now a totally relaxed flyer—I must admit I still feel a little concerned as I board a plane or if we hit a spot of turbulence, and don't expect me to fall asleep during a flight. The real difference for me, though, is that I've passed the hurdle that made the flying experience so terrible. The hurdle was a fear of "losing it" while in an airplane. I realize now that the hurdle was an illusion. I had allowed my mind to believe that "losing it" was a very real possibility, and that very thought would send me into a spiral of panic.

Interestingly, once I tackled the fear of flying, the worry of having a panic attack while on solid ground disappeared. I believe this bonus happened because some part of me reasoned that if I could handle panic while flying without a problem, then a packed theater or a car journey would be a walk in the park.

Fear of Public Speaking

I've often observed that many people's top-ranking fear is not death but having to speak in public. The joke is that these people would rather lay in a casket at their own funeral than give the eulogy. Public speaking for people who suffer from panic attacks or general anxiety often becomes a major source of worry, possibly weeks or even months before the speaking event is to occur.

These speaking engagements don't necessarily have to be the traditional "on a podium" events; they can be as simple as an office meeting where the individual is expected to express an opinion or give verbal feedback. In this case, the fear centers on having a panic attack while speaking. The individuals fear being incapacitated by the anxiety and hence unable to complete what they're saying. They imagine fleeing the spotlight and having to make all kinds of excuses later for their undignified departure out the office window. . .

This differs slightly from the majority of people who fear public speaking. With others, their fear tends to revolve around going blank while speaking or feeling uncomfortable under the spotlight of their peers. The jitters or nerves are, of course, a problem for this group as well—but they're unfamiliar with that debilitating threat, the panic attack, because they most likely haven't experienced one before.

Fear of Public Speaking

So how should a person with an anxiety issue tackle public speaking?

As you are not going to have the opportunity to be counting down mentally during your speech, you will use a modified version of the *21 Second Countdown*. *You will be doing the core steps of the technique minus the countdown.*

In the lead up to your speech, begin by accepting that all of these bizarre and, quite frankly, unnerving sensations aren't going to go away overnight. In fact, you're not even going to concern yourself with getting rid of them for your next talk. When they arrive during a speech or meeting, you're going to approach them in a new manner. Some say that most of the top speakers are riddled with anxiety before an event, but they somehow use this nervousness to enhance their speech. I'm going to show you exactly how to do this.

The average healthy person can experience an extreme array of anxiety and very uncomfortable sensations while giving a speech and is in no danger of ever losing control, or even appearing slightly anxious to the audience. No matter how tough it gets, you'll always finish your piece—even if, at the outset, it feels very uncomfortable to go on. You won't become incapacitated in any way.

Fear of Public Speaking

The real breakthrough happens when you fully believe that you're not in danger and that the sensations will pass. This, in essence, is what the *21 Second Countdown* is meant to encourage. By asking for more, you're saying:

I realize that you [the anxiety] hold no threat over me.

What keeps a panic attack coming again and again is the fear of the fear—the fear that the next one will really knock your socks off and the feeling that you were lucky to have made it past the last one unscathed. Because they were so unnerving and scary, it's your confidence that's been damaged by previous anxiety episodes. Once you fully understand that you're not under any threat, you can then have a new response to the anxiety as it arises while speaking.

There's always a turning point when a person moves from general anxiety into a panic attack, and that happens with public speaking when you think to yourself:

I won't be able to handle this in front of these people.

Fear of Public Speaking

That split second of self-doubt leads to a rush of adrenaline, and the extreme anxiety arrives in a wavelike format. If, however, you feel the initial anxiety and react with confidence that this isn't a threat to you, you'll process the anxiety rapidly.

Using this new approach is a powerful ally because it means that it's okay to feel scared and anxious when speaking. That's fine—you'll feel it, and you'll move with and through the sensations in your body and out the other side. Because people are often very anxious before the talk has begun, they may feel they've already let themselves down. Now you can relax on that point. It's perfectly natural to feel the anxiety.

Take, for example, the worst of the sensations you've ever experienced in this situation—be it general unease or loss of breath. You'll have an initial automatic reaction that says:

Danger—I'm going to have an episode of anxiety here, and I really can't afford for that to happen.

At this point, most people react to that idea and confirm that it must be true because of all the unusual feelings they're experiencing. This is where your train of thought creates a cycle of anxiety that produces a negative impact on your overall presenting skills.

Fear of Public Speaking

So let that initial “Oh dear, not now” thought pass by, and immediately follow it up with the attitude of:

There you are—I’ve been wondering when you would arrive. I’ve been expecting you to show up. By the way, I’m not in the least threatened by any of the strange sensations you’re creating. I’m completely safe here.

Instead of pushing the emotional energy and excitement down into your stomach, you’re moving through it. Your body is in an excited state, exactly as it should be while giving a speech—so release that energy in your self-expression. Push it out through your presentation, not down into your stomach. Push it out by expressing yourself more forcefully. In this way, you turn the anxiety to your advantage by using it to deliver a speech; you’ll come across as more alive, energetic, and in the present moment.

When you notice the anxiety drop, as it does when you willingly move into it, fire off a quick thought when you get a momentary break (as I’m sure you have between pieces), and **demand more**. You want more of its intense feelings because you’re interested in them and absolutely not threatened by them.

It seems like a lot of things to be thinking about while talking to a group of people, but it really isn’t.

Fear of Public Speaking

You'd be amazed at how many different, unrelated thoughts you can have while speaking. This approach is about adopting a new attitude of confidence about what you might have deemed a serious threat up until now.

Here are additional tips on public speaking anxiety:

- If your predominant fear of speaking is driven by a feeling of being trapped, then I suggest factoring in some mental releases that can be prepared before the event. For example, some events allow you to turn the attention back to the room to get feedback, etc., from the audience. If possible, prepare such opportunities in your own mind before the engagements. This isn't to say that you have to use them, but people in this situation often remark that just having small opportunities where attention can be diverted for the briefest moment makes the task seem less daunting. It may even be something as simple as having people introduce themselves or opening the floor to questions. I realize these diversions aren't always possible and depend on the situation, but anything you can factor in that makes you feel less trapped or under the spotlight is worth the effort.

Fear of Public Speaking

- If your speaking anxiety is related to work meetings where you dread being called upon to speak, then turn the situation around by doing the following:

Pretend to yourself and the group that you are actually dying to speak. Before you enter the room, say to yourself: “I’m going to speak at any reasonable opportunity that presents itself”—Be positively itching to speak! Come across as really interested and engaged. Give the impression to the room that you want to speak and be heard. Speaking up works because the anxiety only gets worse if you sit there in total silence waiting to be called upon. Don’t wait for them to call you, speak out and ask questions when appropriate. When it then comes to your official turn to speak, you won’t feel the same level of pressure because everyone in the room is already used to your voice and you don’t feel the pressure of hearing your voice for the first time in the room. Everyone is used to you and you are used to speaking to them.

Great speakers love an opportunity to talk and present. Believe it or not you can train yourself to be like that and it starts by pretending to yourself that you really want that opportunity to be in the lime light.

Fear of Public Speaking

Case Study:

Robert's Public Speaking

I'm the CEO of a software development company. I'm frequently invited to speak at conferences and demo some of our products to audiences that can range from small groups to several hundred people. I had been doing this for many years without any problems, until I had what was later diagnosed by my doctor as a panic attack. My first panic attack occurred during a rather stressed week. I had a late night the previous evening at a corporate function and was slightly hung over the morning of my presentation.

I was about to begin my piece when I felt my heart go into a rapid succession of heartbeats, and my head started to spin. I felt tingles all down my arm and hot flushes. I was convinced I was having a heart attack. I walked over to the organizer and, under the excuse that my PowerPoint presentation was acting up, had him schedule me in at the end of the day.

This incident really scared me, and even though all medical checkups came back fine, I found it hard to believe it was just anxiety. I knew what anxiety was, but I had never experienced it like this before, never to this extreme. As other

Fear of Public Speaking

speaking engagements were scheduled for the rest of the year, I really needed to address this before I totally shied away from appearing in public. This was becoming a real problem in my mind because presenting is a crucial function of my position in the company.

It was my wife who did the research and bought the Panic Away Program for me. We were on a quiet vacation for one week, which allowed me to get some perspective on what was going on. In the evenings, I would make notes from the program and see if there was a way I could implement it fully to help me with this fear. The sensations I had felt were very unnerving, and I wasn't sure if anything other than pharmaceuticals would get me beyond them.

My next talk did not go perfectly to plan as I felt I've presented better, but the big difference was that I didn't fear the sensations that were causing me to panic previously. I thought drugs were needed to numb me to the feelings of fear, but what I learned from the course was that the feelings were fine. They were something my body was doing for whatever reason—rapid heartbeats, sweaty palms, tight chest, and these sensations needed to be processed so they could release, not be suppressed.

What was new, though, was my reaction to those alarming inner sensations. Previously, I had been overreacting to them and telling myself I was going to die on stage. Now, I was moving with the sensations and even welcoming them

Fear of Public Speaking

for coming. I was using this excited nervous energy to present better.

Time went on, and I got more and more comfortable with feeling a little out of control inside myself before a presentation. During the last talk I did in November, I was more relaxed than ever before. I walked on stage with this deep feeling of confidence in my belly—the feeling was grounding me so totally in myself. It was an attitude of:

Well, here we go again. I'm too experienced and long in the tooth to be getting upset by these fearful thoughts and sensations. I'm going to get on with what I'm here to do, and if I drop dead on stage, then what the heck, I drop dead.

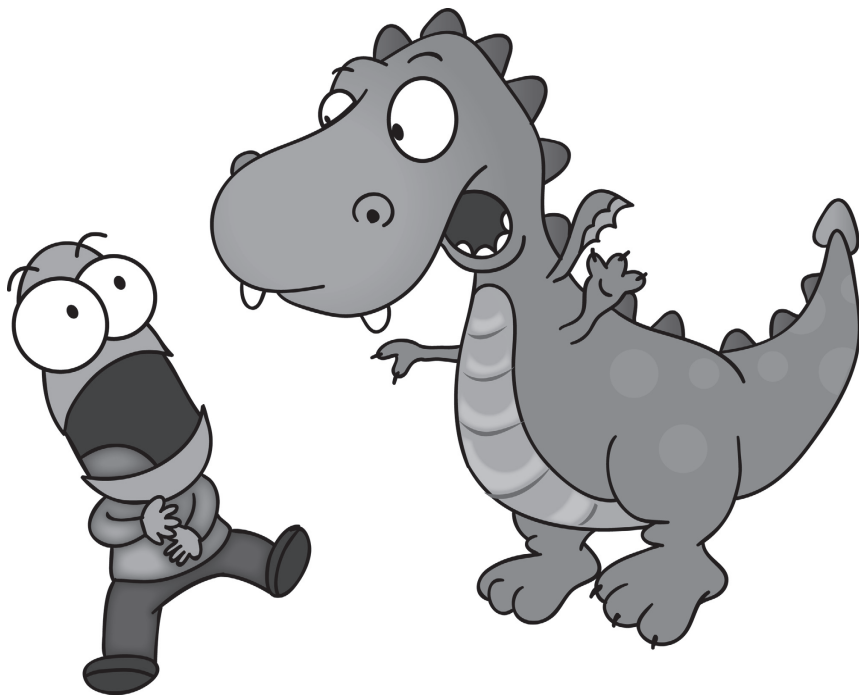
This is the awakening I had from using the program.

Come what may, I am unmoved. I am rock solid inside myself. I personally believe we all spend too much time operating from the thoughts in our heads. Most of the people I work with are out of balance with stress. Panic Away taught me to short-circuit the loop of fearful thinking that was causing the panic and move more into the present moment. By processing the feelings without overreacting to them, I was no

Fear of Public Speaking

longer pushing them away and creating a buildup of internal pressure. Simply being there in the moment with these sensations was allowing them to be processed more effectively and thereby returning me faster to a sense of calm.

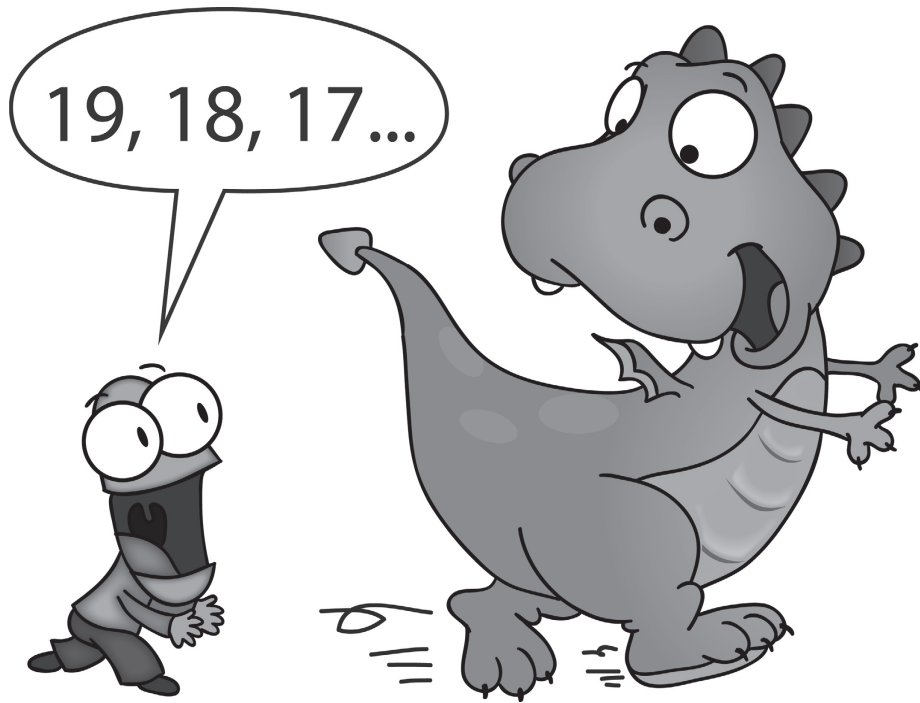
Ok, we have finished the first half of the 21-7 Technique™ and next we will move on to learning how to reduce feelings of general anxiety using the 7 Minute Exercise. Before we do, take a quick look at the following cartoon illustrations. They are a fun and simplified way of remembering some of the key ideas that we have covered.



A panic attack can feel like a monster is about to pounce! Your natural reaction is to run and hide from this terrifying experience.



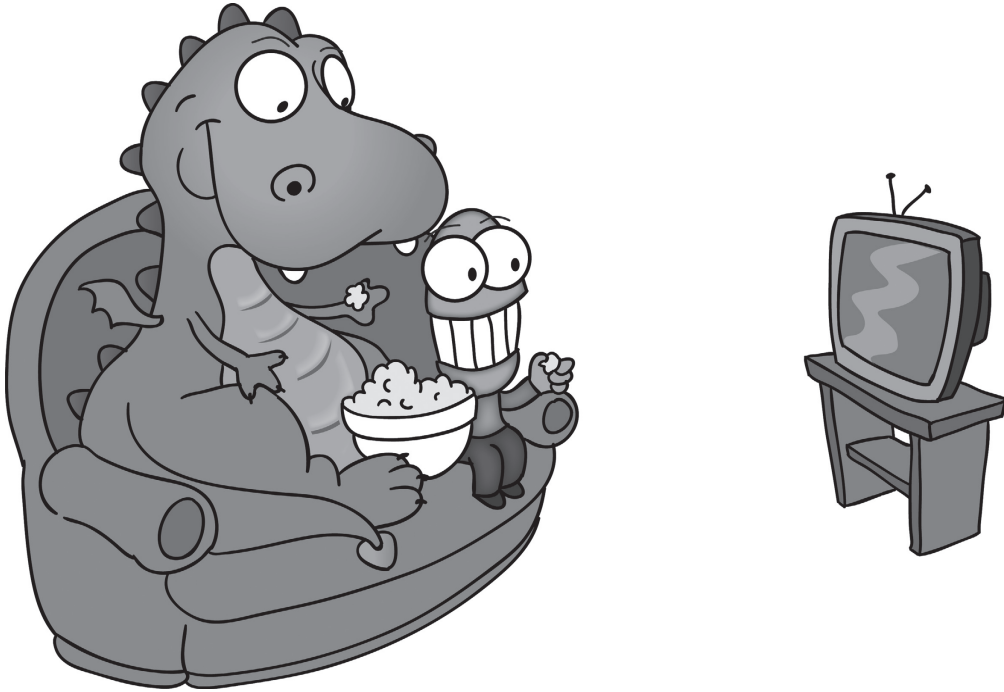
But then you learn an empowering approach. Something that is the complete opposite of what you have always done...



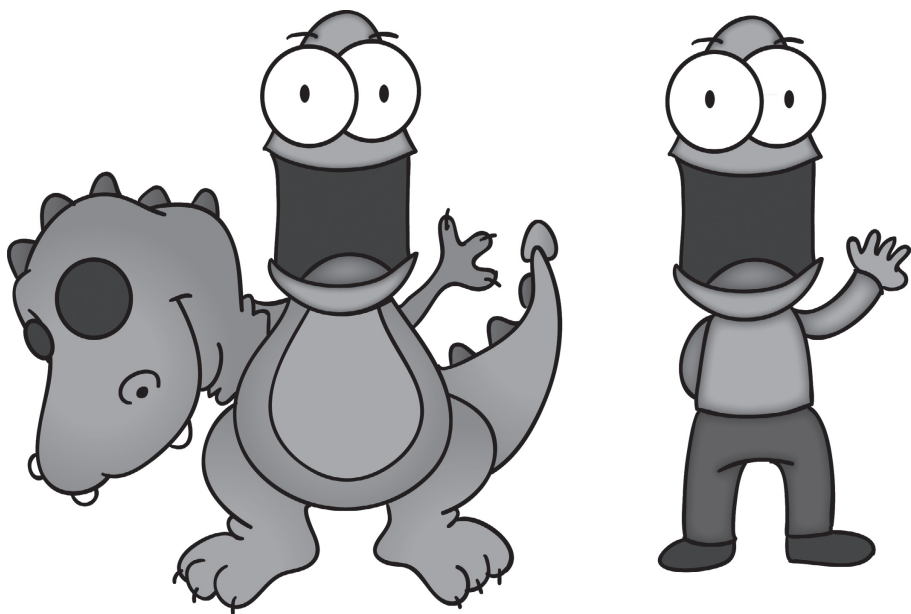
*You turn your fear into excitement.
You demand more. You **BRING IT ON!!!***



Suddenly this monster is no longer something you have to battle against. It becomes your protector and your friend!



Now that you can sit in peace with it, you gain a greater awareness of it. You learn that this monster you feared is in fact...



You

Now Take A Break
Before Beginning
The Next Section

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

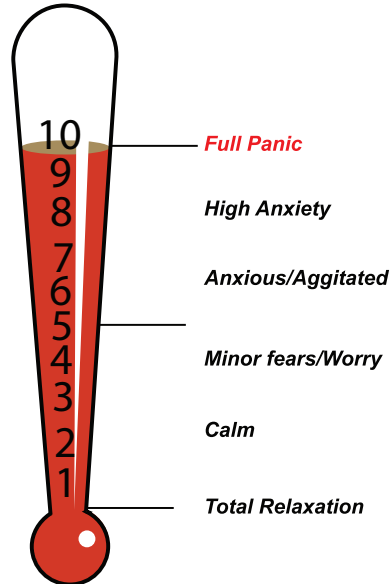
In the previous section you learned how to use the *21 Second Countdown* to end panic attacks. Here you will learn how to dramatically reduce feelings of general anxiety using the *7 Minute Exercise*.

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is best described as a lingering background anxiety that often stays with a person throughout the day. It's associated with exaggerated worry and tension, even though at times nothing seems to provoke it. This disorder often means worrying excessively about health, money, family, or work—and it's also common for a person to be unable to describe exactly what the source of worry is. People who experience GAD often feel it worst upon waking in morning, and it can last throughout the day and disrupt sleep at night. As most doctors will tell you, there are two things that disturb sleep: physical pain and worry. It's therefore understandable that many people with GAD report frequent sleep disturbance as a major problem.

Panic attacks often initiate a period of general anxiety. This is understandable because the panic attack causes such confusion and fear, not just in the moment of panic, but also for days after it has passed. This state of confusion is ripe breeding ground for generalized anxiety disorder to develop. Note that some people who never experience panic attacks can still develop generalized anxiety.

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

If we create a scale of anxiety from 1 to 10, a full-blown panic attack would register at 9 or 10 and total, blissful relaxation would be around 1.



Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

In a typical day, the average person in a metropolitan area might have a stress/anxiety rating of somewhere between 3 and 4. In comparison, people who experience GAD would be in the 5 to 8 range. When a panic attacks occurs, a person might shoot to the top of the scale (9 or 10) and return afterward to the GAD level of 5 to 8. The goal of the *7 Minute Exercise* is to reduce the general anxiety level back down to a normal, everyday stress level, somewhere in the 2 to 4 range.

People who float around the higher end of the scale deal with a continuous sense of unease. It's almost as if their bodies are stuck on a permanent high setting of sensitization and anxiety. This constant anxiety makes them feel jumpy, irritable, and physically unwell. The body becomes tense and uncomfortable, and the mind becomes obsessed with anxious thoughts and sensations. This permanent tension in the mind and body leads to troublesome symptoms like these:

- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Exhaustion
- Vision problems
- Cramps

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

- Intrusive thoughts
- Feelings of unreality and depression
- Sleep disturbance
- Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank

If you've been diagnosed with general anxiety disorder, don't convince yourself that you have a clinical illness—you don't. **This disorder doesn't mean that you have a physical or mental illness.** Your brain is fine, and your body is fine. You're suffering from a sensitized, anxious state.

Our understanding of the mind is still in its infancy, but in the last number of years there have been several breakthroughs coming particularly from fields like neuroscience and neuropsychology. The *7 Minute Exercise* takes some of that new understanding and teaches how to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, bringing about a decrease in anxiety levels. It is an exercise you can do almost anywhere and the benefits become immediately apparent once finished.

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

Before we begin we need to set the stage for the exercise by deciding on a **heart-link** moment.

The Heart-Link

Locking onto a strong emotion of empathy is central to this exercise. We do this by establishing a heart-link. A heart-link is a memory of a very special moment in your life—a moment that triggers a feeling of unconditional love. This special memory will become your heart-link.

The most powerful heart-links are often memories of nursing a newborn. For others it could be taking care of a special pet. It could also be something as simple as a loved one holding your hand. The important thing is that when you think about this memory, you start to connect with your heart and maybe even feel a warm sensation in your chest.

Once you have decided what your heart-link is, close your eyes for a moment and visualize it in great detail. Make the memory as vivid and real as possible. What images do you see, what sounds do you hear, are there any smells or feelings of touch associated with your heart-link? Bring it to life by using all of your five senses to re-create it in your mind's eye.

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

Ok, so once you have decided upon your heart-link we can begin the 7 Minute Exercise. You will need to make a note of the time before you do this exercise to make sure you complete the full 7 minutes. This exercise can be done lying or sitting with your back straight. (*The audio for this exercise accompanies the Panic Away Program.*)



The 7 Minute Exercise

Start by breathing in through your nose, holding, and then out through your mouth.

Breathing in..... hold..... and out..... whooooo.

Imagine when you are inhaling, that you are directing the air into your stomach area, and as you do so allow your stomach to rise slightly.

So, Breathing in... hold... and out.....

Breathing in... hold... and out.....

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

Do this for a few breaths to establish a comfortable rhythm of deep breathing, always allowing the air to fill your stomach area first.

Don't get caught up with how long each breath should be, just find a rhythm that is comfortable for you.

Breathing in... hold... and out.....

Now place your hand on your heart *and as you breathe in* think about your **heart-link**.

Visualize it in detail; bring it fully to life.

As you do so, you might feel a sense of warmth under your hand, as it reflects the good feelings off your hand back into your heart.

Breathing in... (focus on your heart-link) ... and out.....

Breathing in... (focus on your heart-link) ... and out.....

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

So you are breathing in thinking about your heart-link and NOW as you breathe OUT, think or say the words **RELAX** and **RELEASE**.

So it goes like this: breathing in..... (focus on heart-link) and out RELAX and RELEASE

Then again, in..... (focus on heart-link) and out RELAX and RELEASE

As you are saying the words *RELAX and RELEASE*, imagine the tension in your body is floating away. You can think of it like a block of ice melting in the warm sun. The steam rising off the melting ice is the tension drifting away.

Each out-breath is an opportunity for you to let go of a little more tension.

Focus on any area of your body that is tense and as you say or think the words **RELAX** and **RELEASE**, feel that tension release from your body. Then, when you are finished in one area, move on to the next part of your body that feels tense.

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

People find they also get good results when they think of the tense area like a tightly closed fist that is opening out slowly and releasing the tension.

Breathing in... hold... and out..... RELAX and RELEASE

So to summarize...

On the in-breath you will always be focusing on your heart-link and on the out-breath the words RELAX and RELEASE.

Continue doing the exercise breathing in and out *for a minimum of 7 minutes* but, of course, keep going if you are enjoying it and starting to feel more and more relaxed.

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

If at any point during the exercise you feel uncomfortable with the deep breathing, you can do the exercise at your normal breathing rhythm, again thinking of the heart-link on the in-breath and the words RELAX, RELEASE on the out-breath.

This is a very powerful exercise to do after the 21 Second Countdown as it will help bring your general anxiety right down, *but only do it* once you feel more settled and the threat of a panic attack has gone; otherwise you might feel uncomfortable with the deep breathing.

This exercise can also be used as a stand-alone exercise for general anxiety. In such cases, I recommend you do it three times a day: once in the morning, then in the afternoon, and lastly in bed at night.

The reason this exercise works so well is because it is designed to trigger neural circuits that calm the heart, relax the gut, and switch off the stress response. Deep breathing triggers the vagus nerve, which is the main route of the parasympathetic nervous system. When the vagus nerve is activated, heart rate slows down, blood pressure drops, and the body goes into a state of physical calm.

Eliminating General Anxiety Using the 7 Minute Exercise

The vagus nerve also sends out acetylcholine—a neurotransmitter which tells the body to relax and, interestingly, also reduces inflammation in the body.

Focusing on the heart-link has its own special calming effect. Oxytocin is a powerful hormone in stress relief. When we hug or kiss a loved one, oxytocin levels go up. The hormone plays a huge role in bonding and for this reason has been given the nickname ‘the cuddle hormone’.

Although the research, introduced to me by Capt. Tom Bunn, is only in the early stages, it suggests that *moments of empathy* stimulate the release of the hormone, bringing about an anti-stress response. By focusing on your heart-link you are encouraging the feeling of empathy and triggering a state of calm. These physiological responses are what make the *7 Minute Exercise* such a powerful antidote to stress and anxiety. All you have to do is take the time to do it!

Important: Do not get upset if you still feel anxious after having completed the 7 Minute Exercise. Sometimes you need to practise the exercise several times to feel a strong result. So if it does not reduce, for whatever reason, allow the anxiety to be present. Don’t get upset or frustrated but rather decide to practise the exercise again later that day. *Complete acceptance of all the anxiety you feel, is crucial for recovery.*

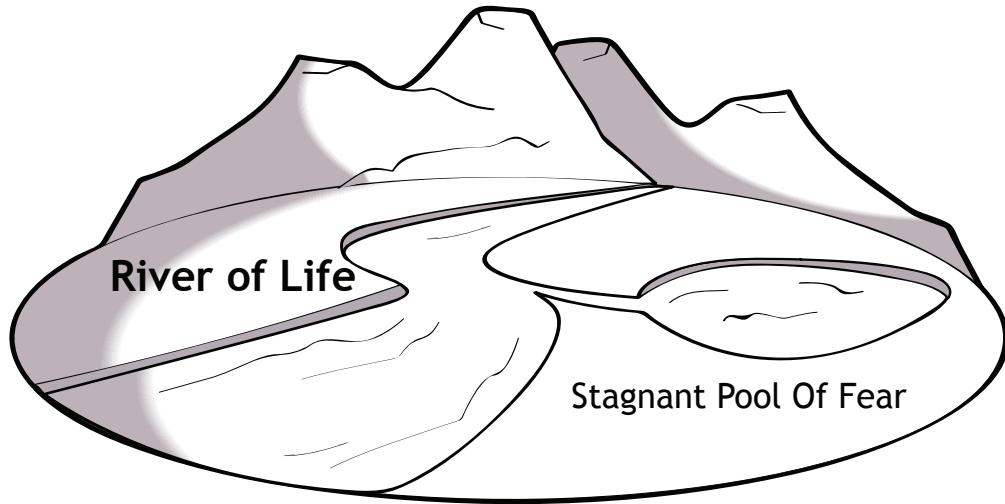
The Next Section
Helps You To Seal
Your Recovery

C.A.L.M. Recovery

Imagine life as a fast flowing river moving towards the sea. Fear is an obstruction in that river causing stagnant pools of water, where life no longer flourishes. The 21-7 Technique™ is designed to get you quickly out of that stagnant pool and back into the river of life (your natural flow).

Often this technique alone is enough to achieve a full recovery but sometimes people need additional support and exercises to keep them moving forward with their recovery (especially after they experience a setback).

We begin this additional support section with C.A.L.M. Recovery



C.A.L.M. Recovery

C.A.L.M Recovery is extremely helpful for the long term healing of anxiety. The word C.A.L.M. is an acronym for:

Community Support

Acceptance

Lifestyle Changes

Meaning

If you implement the C.A.L.M. Recovery you will rapidly speed up the time it takes for you to heal your anxiety. It is a holistic approach to recovery in that it focuses on the bigger picture of a person's life in order to heal the anxiety.

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Community Support

Because there is still some stigma about mental health issues, people tend to hide their anxiety from others rather than share it. This can result in the person feeling isolated and fearful of what others might think

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of them. Having the right kind of social support can end that isolation and reduce feelings of anxiety quickly. When studying people who handle stress well, you will almost always find social support playing a key role.

We all know instinctively that social support is helpful and that is why, when faced with problems, we seek solace from friends or join support groups. Even a few minutes on the phone with a friend can end a day's worry and put things in a better perspective. A problem shared is a problem halved.

What is worth noting, however, is that the stress-reducing benefits of social support are not only brought about by sharing your problems but also by simply interacting with others.

Neuroscientist Steven W. Porges, PhD, director of the Brain-Body Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago, says that engaging socially, smiling, and participating in calm conversations is very good for us. He proposes that when we connect with people that we are comfortable with, we trigger the vagus nerve, which calms the heart, relaxes the gut, and turns off the fear response. I mentioned the vagus nerve before and the role it plays when doing the 7 minute exercise to reduce general anxiety. Here we're seeing its

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activation by social interactions.

It is worth pointing out, though, that not all social interaction is stress-reducing. We all know plenty of situations and people that would cause our stress levels to rise rather than fall, so for positive results you have to feel comfortable with the people you are interacting with.

Social interaction also works as a great distraction from things that are troubling you. Quite often people with an anxiety disorder find it hard to stop checking in to see how they are feeling. When engaged in conversation or an activity, the person mentally takes a break from checking in for longer than they normally would. It is like taking a mini-vacation from your troubles.

The benefits of social support are not only about being on the receiving end.

You can start feeling much better about yourself and your anxiety by reaching out and supporting others. Joining a local charity or community group where you reach out and help others is one of the fastest ways to end social isolation and help you feel better about yourself. In his book *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, Robert Sapolsky says that one of the strongest stress-reducing qualities of social support is the act of giving

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social support.

Getting involved in something like charitable work makes a person feel good about themselves and much more in control of their own issues.

C.A.L.M. Recovery

Aceptance

One of the most effective ways to lower your anxiety is to increase your acceptance of the sensations you feel. The more acceptance you have of your anxiety, the faster your recovery.

When we fully accept what we are feeling, the issue we accept goes through a subtle transformation. The issue transforms to our advantage because we stop resisting it. Lama Govinda said “*We are transformed by what we accept.*”

As previously explained, fighting and resisting anxiety causes mental friction that fuels the fire of fear. The more resistance you create towards it, the more anxious you feel. Acceptance, on the other hand,

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dampens that fire and allows healing to occur. Each time you think, *'I can't handle this anxiety! I can't handle these bodily sensations'*, you toss more fuel on the fire.

There is a way to reverse this and end the anxiety. You can do it by simply increasing your level of acceptance towards the anxiety you feel. But wait, anxiety causes you to feel upset, lost, and afraid, so why would you want to accept that?

For a start, acceptance of the anxiety you experience places you back into your natural flow. It ends the mental conflict of wishing things were different. The wishing creates frustration and yearning for things to be different.

"I just wish I didn't feel like this and that this anxiety would stop... what if I am like this forever? What if my body can't cope and I suffer X, Y, and Z.... I wish I felt different"

Wishing you were not anxious is like wishing you were not hungry. It creates more upset and does nothing to solve the problem.

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“I used to be so carefree and now look, I cant even go shopping—this is so unacceptable”

Complete acceptance of your present condition eases the mental turmoil and helps cool the frustration of wishing it was different. Acceptance centers you and gives you back your power to create a real change and to transform the anxiety. Acceptance draws a line in the sand of what has gone on in the past and gives you a clear starting point to move forward and achieve an anxiety-free state.

The greater your level of acceptance, the faster your recovery.



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So how do you begin to accept your anxiety and its uncomfortable sensations?

You achieve this through your feelings, not through your thoughts. Mentally saying the words ‘I accept my anxiety’ is not enough. You need to adopt an attitude of complete acceptance into your feelings. Feel the acceptance in every part of your body.

When you fully accept anxious bodily sensations they start to settle and calm down. It’s a bit like wearing a tight, uncomfortable piece of clothing—once you decide to stop being upset with the uncomfortable sensations of it, you calm down and become less agitated. Even though the clothing is still tight, you actually start to notice it less and less.

Your anxiety is not your enemy; it is a part of you that you are now learning to fully accept. Give it permission to manifest in whatever way it wishes. You’re waving a white flag and declaring a truce between you and your anxiety. Before, you were resisting each and every sensation, but now you’re sitting in complete and absolute acceptance of it all, allowing the sensations to do what they will. In her book *Hope and Help for Your Nerves*, Dr Claire Weekes referred to this process as “floating” with your anxiety.

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After a while you will start to notice the general anxiety less and less. It has not gone away yet, but your attention is less drawn to it because you are no longer reacting to it with frustration and fear.

The biggest resistance I notice people have to acceptance is the fear of opening the door and then becoming flooded by anxiety.

“I don’t want to accept this feeling because it may just get worse and worse.”

This fear of losing control is a misconception born out of high anxiety. Anxiety will not cause you to lose control. The reason this fear arises is because your body feels so unusual and your mind interprets that feeling to mean a potential loss of control. Once your anxiety reduces, this fear leaves.

The other thing to remember is that accepting your anxiety does not mean you are giving in to it. All it means is that you are no longer going to struggle with it. Acceptance will teach you that you are perfectly safe and that the anxious bodily sensations are not something to worry about.

If you were capable of switching to complete acceptance in this very moment, you would notice some subtle changes happening. First of all, the type of thoughts you think would change. You would no longer

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be worried about your health or that you were losing your sanity. Your attention would switch from worry to the present moment.

Within a few minutes, the bodily sensations that trigger the anxious thoughts would be much less noticeable. They could still be present but they would hardly register on your awareness. Then, over the course of a few days, your general anxiety level would drop right down and you would feel a deeper sense of peace and calm.

What I am describing is the ideal state of complete acceptance. No one is expecting you to automatically switch over to such a high level of acceptance overnight. What you want to aim for is to achieve this gradually over a period of a few weeks, starting right now. Here is how you do that:

Decide to raise your level of acceptance for a short period each day. For just 10 minutes, you are not going to get upset by any of the sensations or thoughts you are having. You are going to accept them all to the very best of your ability. It's only for 10 minutes, and after the 10 minutes are up you can go back to resisting and worrying all you like.

So feel all the sensations that scare you and accept them all. Enjoy the ebb and flow of the adrenaline as

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it travels around your body; feel your heart pound and your blood rush through your veins. Notice how alive you feel. You are learning to befriend your anxiety and make peace with it through acceptance.

Say to yourself:

I accept the way I feel right now. I am not going to try and change it. It is what it is and no wishing it were different will change that.

By the way, real acceptance is not, “*I accept what’s happening, and now that I accept it, PLEASE MAKE IT STOP!*”

Rather, it is this:

“In this very moment I accept what I’m feeling, I’m not going to get upset or worried about it. I know all of this is a series of sensations caused by anxiety. I know I am safe. I know I can handle it. If the sensations stay all day, that is fine. It is what it is and I accept that fully”.

It is natural in the beginning to find your mind resisting this exercise. When that happens remind

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yourself it is only for 10 minutes and then move your attention back to acceptance. Practicing just 10 minutes of acceptance daily will rapidly increase your acceptance levels.

It is important to stress that when doing this exercise the idea is to accept, not to get rid of, the anxiety. If you do the exercise with the sole intention of eliminating the anxiety you will only get frustrated by the fact that you can still feel it after the exercise is over. The goal here is to increase your level of acceptance. The positive side effect of this increase is a rapid reduction in anxiety...



Tip: *Another great exercise to help you accept anxious bodily sensations is called the Symphony Technique. The Symphony Technique is an audio recording designed specifically to help you accept and release anxious bodily sensations through movement. The recording accompanies this program.*

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Lifestyle Changes

There are two areas in your lifestyle that can bring about a substantial decrease in your anxiety level. Those are two areas are **exercise and diet**.

I don't recommend making big changes in either of these two areas because big changes are often not sustainable. What I recommend is making small changes that will have a big impact.

The first area to address is:

Diet.

- Increase your intake of healthy carbohydrates. Carbohydrate-rich meals help release serotonin in the brain, which in turn creates a sense of peace and calm. So make sure your diet is rich in complex carbohydrates such as whole grains (oatmeal, brown rice, and whole wheat are some great sources).

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- Reduce your alcohol intake. Even though you'll feel calm immediately after drinking alcohol, once it is metabolized in the body you will probably experience anxiety-like symptoms, or "jitters." Avoid or eliminate alcohol from your diet whenever possible.
- Drink more water. Mild dehydration can leave you feeling on edge, so make sure you're drinking at least 8 glasses of water every day.
- Reduce caffeine intake. Caffeine is a powerful stimulant that can make you feel nervous, anxious, and jittery. It can also make it difficult for you to enjoy a restful night's sleep. Reduce or eliminate caffeine from your diet to enjoy a more stable mood.
- Eat foods that induce relaxation. Milk, cheese, peanut butter, oats, soy, and sesame seeds are very good sources of tryptophan. Tryptophan helps release chemicals in the brain to induce relaxation.

Making changes to your diet can have a very positive effect on your mood, and simple strategies like these could make a very big difference for you. A balanced diet is a vital part of a healthy lifestyle, so take some time to assess what you need to change or add to your diet.

Supplements

Vitamins and minerals are absolutely essential to normal bodily functions, including the autonomic nervous system. A good example of their importance is demonstrated by the role played by magnesium. Magnesium is instrumental in over 270 biochemical reactions in the body. It also helps regulate the pH (acid-base balance) of the human body. In her book *The Miracle of Magnesium*, Dr. Carolyn Dean talks about treating anxiety as well as a wide range of other conditions using magnesium alone.

All the vitamins and minerals we need are usually found naturally in the food that we eat. However, the vitamin and mineral content in our food has diminished over the years, therefore it may be necessary to take supplements. I recommend a good B complex vitamin along with Magnesium Citrate.

To reduce anxiety further through the use of supplements, I suggest you take our specially formulated Panic Away blend which contains several natural ingredients recognized for their ability to facilitate relaxation and reduce feelings of general anxiety. To learn more visit:

www.PanicAway.com/supplement

Please note, you should always consult your health care practitioner before taking any supplements.

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Before I finish discussing diet, I want to address concerns over the artificial sweetener aspartame. It's commonly used in diet soft drinks and sugar-free chewing gum, and it's frequently provided as a table condiment. There's a lot of information circulating on the Internet about its connection to anxiety as well as numerous other medical problems. Fueling this suspicion about aspartame is controversy regarding the circumstances of its approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the UK's Food Standards Agency.

I don't have an opinion as to whether this substance increases feelings of anxiety or not. I know that people do report feeling better when they cut all diet soft drinks from their diet, but whether this has anything to do with the sweetener is impossible for me to say. If you're concerned, you might want to examine your diet to see if you consume much aspartame. If you do consume it, experiment by leaving it out of your diet for a period of time, and record if you notice any difference in your anxiety level.

Exercise

Exercise is a wonderful all-around practice for gaining the upper hand on feelings of general anxiety. Besides all of the well-documented benefits of regular exercise, it also greatly helps you increase confidence

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and belief in your body's ability.

During a panic attack, many of the symptoms are similar to those of a really good workout:

- Increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Increased bodily sensations
- Rapid breathing

Frequently, people with anxiety disorders feel uncomfortable when they start exercising because of the heightened bodily sensations, but this usually changes quickly. In fact, one of the greatest advantages of a healthy cardiovascular workout is that it teaches you to be comfortable with your body in a heightened state of exertion.

Vigorous exercise allows you the opportunity to safely exert your body to a heightened state of activity not dissimilar to the way it reacts during a panic attack. Exercise pushes the boundaries of acceptable exertion, and it trains us to become more comfortable with physical sensations such as heavy breathing and a rapid heartbeat. If you give your body regular opportunities to move from an exerted state back to a relaxed

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one, you will not feel threatened if your heartbeat increases rapidly during a panic attack. You have the experience and confidence to say to yourself that your body is well able to handle such a state because it's done so many times before. You have the awareness that, in a short period of time, your body will return as always, to a more relaxed state.

For many, the compounding fear factor of a panic attack comes from the anxiety over unusual bodily reactions. Exercise is a healthy, self-imposed stress on the body. It helps you release pent-up tensions inside, and it can be a useful exhaust or vent for any emotions that you need to release.

To help build this innate confidence in your body's physical ability, you need a minimum of twenty to thirty minutes of cardiovascular exercise. This could be power walking, jogging, running, swimming—anything that gets you working up a good sweat. When beginning your exercise program, it's best to go easy and set modest goals. Choose an activity that's convenient and enjoyable so that you'll stick with it.

Get your body in a heightened state of exertion, where your heart beats rapidly and you breathe heavily. The best exercise is one where you work yourself to a peak for a few minutes, then slow down, rest, and build yourself up again. This helps push your body further each time, always moving upward, never

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stagnant. As you really get your body in shape, your overall confidence improves. I'm sure you've already experienced the natural lift exercise can give. It sends a clear message throughout your body that having your heart beat in quick succession and increasing your respiration are perfectly natural and well within your body's capability.

Recent research proves that exercise fuels the brain's stress buffers. Preliminary evidence suggests that physically active people have lower rates of anxiety and depression than sedentary people. Researchers are now looking at possible links between exercise and the brain chemicals associated with stress, anxiety, and depression. Research carried out by Mark Sothmann, PhD, of the Indiana University School of Medicine suggests that exercise seems to give the body a chance to practice dealing with stress biologically. It forces the body's physiological systems—all of which are involved in the stress response—to communicate much more closely than usual: the cardiovascular system communicates with the renal system, which then communicates with the muscular system.

All of these are controlled by the central and sympathetic nervous systems, which also must communicate with each other. This workout of the body's communication system may be the true value of exercise.

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There's no doubt about it—beginning and sticking with a proper exercise regime takes commitment. If you feel you don't have the time to invest in this, you may have missed a very important point. Exercising has tremendously positive benefits for your mental, emotional, and physical health. Your energy levels will soar, and your resistance to stress will increase, therefore reducing the general feelings of anxiety that we spoke about earlier. Your general outlook on life will improve as your confidence in your own body grows. As a final point on exercise, be kind to yourself. Don't berate yourself if you feel you're out of shape because you can't jog around the block. Take it slowly at first, and be determined. If you can incorporate regular exercise into your life, the benefits will be profound.

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Meaning

If I were you ask you how do you feel about your anxiety problem, how would you respond? Do you resent it? Do you wish it never happened? Do you feel cheated by it? Think about this for just a moment before reading on.

Most people who have an anxiety disorder would understandably have one of the above reactions. It is

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very hard to feel anything but resentful towards the anxiety problem. You may have gone from being a carefree person to someone who is preoccupied with what will happen as soon as you leave your home. It may seem like anxiety has stolen your carefree disposition.

What if you could change the way you feel about your anxiety? What if changing the way you perceive your anxiety could speed up your recovery?

Dr. Viktor Frankl wrote a book called '*Man's Search For Meaning*'. This book is among the most influential works of psychiatric literature and according to a survey conducted by the Library of Congress, belongs to a list of "the ten most influential books in the United States".

'Man's Search For Meaning' is a deeply moving personal essay about Dr. Frankl's imprisonment in the concentration camps of World War 2. During, and partly because of, his suffering he developed a revolutionary approach to psychotherapy known as logotherapy.

Logotherapy, quite simply put, is a therapy that teaches healing through meaning. It explains how most,

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if not all, neuroses of modern man can be healed by the individual rediscovering meaning in their life. What Dr. Frankl teaches is that regardless of the predicament, people always have the ability to turn a tragedy into a triumph.

In relation to anxiety, that means you can decide to find meaning in the experience and rise above it. By finding meaning you transform the experience of anxiety into something positive.

You can bring meaning to this suffering. You have the free will to decide whether you want to feel like a victim of anxiety or triumph over it by determining your own reaction to it. You always have freedom to take a stand. Despair is suffering without meaning. Once meaning is found, despair can be turned into a personal triumph.

If you look for the deeper meaning in your challenge with anxiety, you can discover the gift that it holds for you. The simplest way to begin doing this is to write down the things you feel you are learning from your anxiety, and then write down the reason you want to succeed and overcome it.

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For example:

What's the meaning of these panic attacks?

Panic attacks are teaching me more about myself. This is a crash course in self development.

Reason to overcome:

I want to develop and become a bigger person.

What's the meaning of this general anxiety?

Anxiety is showing me where I hold myself back.

Reason to overcome:

I want to live a more expansive, adventurous life.

Why am I the only one who feels like this? What's the meaning of this?

Anxiety is teaching me greater compassion for myself and others.

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Reason to overcome:

I want to help others that are going through the same thing and teach them how to handle their anxiety.

Dr. Frankl says that the meaning people find in their predicament is often connected to a desire to do a deed, complete a piece of work, or accomplish an important goal. It can be as simple as spending more time with loved ones or realizing dreams of making the world a better place.

Once meaning is discovered, the person becomes capable of transforming the suffering.

Here is a simplistic example, but it illustrates the point. A man wakes in the morning to find his muscles aching with pains all over his body. As he comes out of his sleep, he cannot think why his body would be in such awful pain and begins to feel miserable about his predicament, imagining how difficult it will be to do a full day's work feeling like this. A split second later he remembers that the night before he was training intensely for an upcoming marathon. Suddenly, the pain has a meaning and he can see a reason for it. He immediately stops feeling miserable as he realizes his discomfort is part of his goal to complete a 26-mile run. He no longer feels upset and the pain no longer feels a burden.

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Another example might be a dentist who warns the patient that the procedure he is about to perform is going to be quite painful but necessary for the maintenance of his teeth. The patient bears the pain well because he sees a good reason for the pain. The pain experienced is not meaningless, it has value and for that reason becomes endurable.

Only you can find the meaning to your personal challenge. Once you find that meaning, determine one or more reasons for overcoming that challenge. Your indomitable courage can become an inspiration to yourself and those that know you.

Dr. Frankl says “A human being, by the very attitude he chooses, is capable of finding and fulfilling meaning in even a hopeless situation.” When you find meaning in your anxiety you transcend it, and a new dimension of hope opens to you.

Anytime you feel yourself slip with a setback, remind yourself of the bigger picture and focus on that. Remember the special journey you are on. Remember the gift anxiety holds for you. If you focus on this, you will keep moving forward even on the most difficult of days.

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Like much of what you learn in Panic Away, solutions are often found by thinking unconventionally.

Not many books will tell you that your anxiety can in fact become your greatest asset. That you can turn this problem to your advantage, that it can change you for the better. Look for the deeper meaning in your challenge with anxiety and you will discover the gift it holds for you. By the way, I should point out that the meaning you might discover does not have to be grandiose; something as simple as loving or serving another human being can fulfill a deep sense of meaning.

In conclusion, Dr. Frankl argues that mankind's deepest desire and drive is to discover meaning in life and if that drive is frustrated for any reason, it results in many of the common ills that we see in modern society today. He explains that happiness will always remain elusive if it is pursued as an end goal in itself. You must discover meaning in your life and then happiness comes about as a by-product of a life lived with meaning.

So that brings us to the end of C.A.L.M. Recovery.

Community Support

Acceptance

Lifestyle Changes

Meaning

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If you implement this holistic approach to recovery, you will re-establish your natural flow and find yourself making very fast progress. What follows now is specific help for situations such as, anxious thoughts and bodily sensations, insomnia, morning anxiety, phobias, and setbacks.

Dealing with: Unwanted Anxious Thoughts

People who experience anxiety and panic attacks frequently have to deal with the negative side effects of unwanted anxious thoughts. These thoughts can range from worries about health, concern over loved ones, or even fears that don't make any rational sense at all but continue to linger in the mind. Sometimes, unwanted anxious thoughts come from previous experiences; other times, they're simply bizarre—leaving the person worried as to why such strange thoughts would occur.

In this section I want to address unwanted thoughts that can often be violent or sexual in nature or that relate to something harmful happening to you or your loved ones. To give you an example, it is quite common for new mothers to experience such anxious thoughts in relation to doing something harmful to their children. Another typical example might be a person looking down from a height and suddenly fearing they might lose control and jump. The person has absolutely no intention of doing these things but the very thought of the idea sends shockwaves of anxiety through their body.

People understandably feel a huge amount of distress and guilt for having such thoughts and can't understand why they would even think such thoughts. It is very important that if this is a problem for you, that you understand these thoughts are very common and they do not signal you are losing control or going insane. They are almost always the result of an active imagination fueled by anxiety. Once you

Dealing with: Unwanted Anxious Thoughts

understand that, you can then resolve the problem much more quickly.

Everyone experiences disturbing thoughts; the difference is that because the anxious person is so sensitized, they experience a sudden overreaction of fear to the thought (like an electrical jolt to the stomach) and that in turn fuels the thoughts even further. To effectively tackle such unwanted thoughts, you need to do three things.

- Work on **reducing your anxiety level** every day using the tools we have already discussed.
- Adopt an attitude of **complete acceptance** toward the content or subject matter of the unwanted thoughts.
- Practice **specific exercises** to end anxious thoughts (see below)

Dealing with: Unwanted Anxious Thoughts

The Attitude of Acceptance

It's not the anxious thought itself that causes you distress. It's how you respond to that thought. It's your reaction to the thought that enables the thought to have influence and power over you. To better understand how unwanted thoughts come about, it helps to paint a playful visual picture of how this happens. This example will help you better understand how to deal with the issue.

Imagine yourself standing on a street, and all around you thoughts are lazily floating by. Some of the thoughts are your own, and other thoughts are from outside sources you access, such as newspapers, TV, magazines, etc. You notice that when you pay attention to a thought, it gravitates nearer. The thoughts you ignore float on by.

When you focus on and closely examine a thought, you notice how it connects to another similar thought, and you find yourself jumping from one thought to the next. Sometimes these are practical, day-to-day thoughts, or they can be full of imagination like daydreams.

In our imagined scenario, you unexpectedly notice a thought that hovers in front of you and scares you.

Dealing with: Unwanted Anxious Thoughts

This thought is called “Fear X.” X could be panic attacks, ill health, or doing something bizarre and out of character. In a sensitized state, you find it impossible not to look at the thought, and as you give it your full attention, this causes it to come closer and closer. When you examine the thought, you begin to react with fear because you don’t like what you see. You further notice how that initial scary thought is connected to more worrisome “what if” thoughts that you also examine in detail. The more you try to escape from the thought by pushing it away, the more it seems to follow you around as if it were stuck to you. You try to focus on more pleasant thoughts, but you find yourself continuously coming back to the fearful thought.

Have you ever heard the expression “thoughts sticking like glue”? The very act of reacting emotionally to the thought glues it to you all the more, and the more you worry and obsess about the thought, the more that glue becomes hardened over time. The thought—and all of its associated thoughts—are there in the morning when you wake up and at night when you try to get some sleep. The thought becomes stuck to your psyche because your emotional reaction is its sticking power. Thoughts are a form of energy, and they’re neither good nor bad. How we judge those thoughts determines how much impact they have on our lives. Thoughts first need to be fed by attention, but what they really love is a good, strong emotional

Dealing with: Unwanted Anxious Thoughts

reaction to make them stick!

People in sensitized states might literally jump at the very idea of a certain thought and chastise themselves over and over for ever having the thought in the first place. Have you ever noticed that when you're mentally exhausted, thoughts can almost grate away at you, how an annoying pop song won't leave your head, or a silly concern changes from a minor niggle to an unbearable stress? Mental exhaustion is a major contributor to repetitive anxious thoughts, just like the needle of a record player stuck in a groove that loops over and over.

Most anxious thoughts are attracted to us by the attention we pay them, and they then stick firmly in place by our level of emotional reaction to them. This is an important point. **A thought can have an influence over you only if you allow it to.** Your emotional reaction is a thought's energy source. What's interesting is that either a positive or a negative emotional reaction is fine for the thought. Energy and attention are what attracts it. Once you have an emotional reaction to a thought, you're regularly drawn to that thought until the emotional reaction has dissipated and the thought then fades away.

Dealing with: Unwanted Anxious Thoughts

For example, if someone you know pays you a very positive compliment, you may find yourself unintentionally drawn to that thought any time you have a spare moment. You probably find that it improves your overall level of confidence and mood throughout the day. Each time you catch yourself in the mirror you are reminded of the thought. Sadly, however, we tend to focus less on the positive and more on the negative. We seem to forget those positive compliments all too easily, and we're more frequently drawn to what might upset us. Take the opposite example: if someone you know insults you, I'm sure that you find the emotional reaction to that thought much more intense and probably very long-lasting.

So the basic pattern of thinking is this: If you're not engaged in an activity or task, your mind tends to wander toward any thoughts to which you have a strong emotional reaction.

What I suggest is that the most effective way to eliminate unwanted thoughts is to stop trying to suppress them. Thought suppression studies have proven that the very act of trying to suppress a thought results only in a higher frequency of the unwanted thought occurring. This has been termed the "rebound effect." Simply put, the more you try to suppress a thought, the more the unwanted thought keeps

Dealing with: Unwanted Anxious Thoughts

popping up (rebounding).

So how do we begin to tackle this problem of unwanted thoughts?

You need a change of attitude. By a change in attitude, I mean a change in the way you react to the thoughts. This goes back to the idea of increasing your level of acceptance mentioned earlier in C.A.L.M. Recovery. **An attitude of acceptance quickly disarms the emotional reaction you have to the fearful thoughts.** Once the emotional reaction has been significantly reduced, the unwanted anxious thoughts dissipate. In the past, you've probably tried to rid yourself of the thoughts by attempting not to think about them. The trick, however, is not to turn away from them, but to accept them as they run through your mind. We can never fully control what goes through our minds, but we can control how we react to what goes on there. That's the key difference between someone who gets caught up in fearful thinking and someone who does not.

The thoughts that terrify us aren't fueled by some unknown force, they are our own. When you have an uncomfortable thought you'd rather not be thinking, your first reaction is usually to tense up internally

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and say to yourself, “Oh no, I don’t like that idea. I don’t want that thought right now.” The very act of trying to push the thought away, and then understandably getting upset when that doesn’t work, causes the thought to become more stuck to your psyche.

It’s like saying to your mind over and over again, “Whatever you do, don’t think of pink elephants.” Guess what? You can’t get a single thought in that’s not related to pink elephants.

As long as you struggle with the thought, your mind keeps returning to it. This is not to say that your mind is working against you. It’s better to compare the mind to a mischievous monkey throwing things at you in order to get your attention. That monkey needs to be trained and you do that as follows: Let’s say you have fear “X” going on in your mind. That fear can be virtually anything your mind might conceive. You know the thoughts aren’t a realistic fear, and you want them to stop interrupting your life.

The next time the fearful thought comes to mind, don’t push it away. This is important. Tell yourself that that’s fine, the thought can continue to play in your mind if it wishes, but you’re not going to give it much notice—and you’re certainly not going to qualify it by reacting with fear. You know

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in your heart that the thought is very unlikely to happen. You have a deeper sense of trust, and you won't be emotionally tossed around all day by a thought.

You allow the thought to have its moment of attention. You accept it and don't react to it, then move your attention gently back to what you really want to focus on.

What's of key importance is not to get upset by the thoughts as they arise. Here are a few helpful tips on how to do that:

- To avoid a fearful reaction to the thought, immediately give the fear some cartoon characteristics.
- Imagine, for example, it is Donald Duck telling you, "Something awful is going to happen. Aren't you scared?"
- Give the character a squeaky voice, and make it a totally ridiculous scene. How can you take an anxious duck with big feet seriously? This use of cartoon imagery reprograms your initial emotional reaction to the thought and eliminates any authority the thought may have over you.

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- As the thought rambles on about all the scary things it wants to share with you, watch it getting smaller and smaller, as if you were watching it on a television screen, then... ‘pop!’ it disappears. When that’s done, move your attention back to whatever you were doing. Remember, you don’t try to force the thought away because you don’t like it. You simply accept it and then make it inconsequential as you turn your attention to other things.

This takes practice in the beginning, but what happens is that, during the day, you find yourself checking in on how you feel less and less. Because the anxious thought doesn’t have a strong fearful emotion connected to it, your mind isn’t drawn to it. To put it another way, the thought becomes unstuck and fades away because the emotional reaction has been neutralized.

Visualization Tool for Ending Anxious Thinking

Anxiety can cause an imbalance in your life whereby all of the mental worry creates a top-heavy sensation. Your entire focus is moved from the center of your body to your head.

Schools of meditation often demonstrate an example of this top-heavy imbalance by showing how easily the body can lose its sense of center when caught up in mental activity. A student is asked to come to the front of

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the group and stand with his legs apart. The teacher then asks him to focus on a personal worry or concern. Once the student is fixated on the worry, the teacher quietly moves to the student's side and tells him he's going to attempt to push him over. The teacher pushes on the student's shoulder and topples the student with relative ease. The same student is then asked to forget the worry and focus his full attention in his body. The teacher once again tries to topple the student, but he finds much more resistance than before. The student is grounded firmly in place.

This demonstration shows how important it is to feel grounded and centered in *present moment awareness* of your body and not be continuously caught up in mental activity. Present moment awareness is really all about moving your awareness to the moment you find yourself in. It is an idea that is gaining a lot of ground in recent years, as people seek to escape the stress of modern life and become more self-aware. Eckhart Tolle writes very eloquently about the importance of present moment awareness in his book '*The Power of Now*', which I highly recommend.

I'm going to teach you two simple visualizations. The purpose of the visualizations is to enable you to quickly clear mental stress and tension. Use them when you feel your mind is racing with anxious thoughts. *The audio for both of the below visualizations accompany the Panic Away Program.*

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The visualization process, when practiced frequently, is very effective for eliminating deep-seated mental anxieties or intrusive thoughts. There's no right or wrong way to conduct the visualizations. Be intuitive, and don't feel that you're unable to do it if you're not very good at mental imagery. As long as your attention is on the exercise, you'll gain some benefit. It's best to do this in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Then, when you're more practiced, you'll be able to get the same positive results in a busier environment, such as the workplace. You should notice a sensation of calm in your mind and body after each visualization is complete.

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Okay, let's begin.

1st Visualization to end unwanted anxious thoughts

Either sitting or standing, close your eyes and move your attention to your breath. To become aware of your breathing, place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your stomach. Take a breath, and let your stomach swell forward as you breathe in and fall back gently as you breathe out.

Continue the abdominal breathing for about five minutes.

Now move your attention to your feet. Try to really feel your feet. See if you can feel each toe. Picture the base of your feet, and visualize roots slowly growing out through your soles and down into the earth. The roots grow with a quickening pace and reach deep into the soil of the earth. You're now rooted firmly to the earth and feel stable, like a large oak or redwood tree. Imagine what it would feel like if this large tree were swaying gently in the wind. Stay with this feeling of grounded safety and security for a few moments.

Once you've created a strong feeling or impression of being grounded like a tree, visualize a cloud of bright light forming way above you. A bolt of lightning from the luminous cloud hits the crown of your head, and that ignites a band of bright white light that slowly descends from your head all the way down

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your body, over your legs, and out past your toes. As the band of light passes over you, feel it clearing your mental state. It illuminates your mind and clears any rubbish that you may have been thinking about. Repeat this image four or five times until you feel a sense of clearing and release through your feet.

In finishing, see yourself standing under a large, luminescent waterfall. The water is radiant and bubbling with vitality and life. As you stand under the waterfall, feel the water run over every inch of your body, soothing you and instilling within you a sense of deep calm. Try to taste the water. Open your mouth and let the water run in to refresh you. Hear the water as it bounces off the ground around you. The water is life itself, and it's washing away stress and worry from your mind and body.

After a moment, open your eyes.

Try to use all of your senses when carrying out the visualization. To make the pictures in your mind as real as possible, use your senses of touch, taste, and hearing. Feel the water trickle down your body, hear the sound it makes as it splashes over you.

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2nd Visualization to end unwanted anxious thoughts

This visualization is for unwanted thoughts that are particularly persistent and troublesome.

Begin by taking some deep abdominal breaths. Allow yourself a few minutes to get a deep sustained level of breathing going.

As you breathe out, imagine the out-breath as a blue cloud shimmering with a positive radiant light. Repeat this visualization until you can picture this image well in your mind's eye.

The anxious thought that is troubling you will soon float into your awareness. Imagine the anxious thought in your mind's eye like a ball of yellow energy about the size of a tennis ball. It comes in from the side floating two to three feet in front of you. As you become aware of the disturbing thought try not to examine or judge it, but simply give it a label. Say the label to yourself:

Oh, there is 'fear of going mad', 'fear of an illness', 'fear of hurting myself', 'fear of hurting someone else', 'fear I might never feel normal again', etc.

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After giving the anxious thought a label, breathe out slowly and visualize your breath enveloping the thought. The glowing cloud of positive radiant light now surrounds and engulfs the smaller yellow thought. As the thought becomes engulfed, internally say the words:

“acceptance” and “peace.”

The yellow ball is engulfed in a radiant positive energy. It now starts to defuse in the blue cloud and becomes harder to see. Keep breathing on the thought and watch as the blue cloud carries the small yellow ball further and further away. As it floats away the fear you had about the thought is also leaving you. Each time you breathe out towards the thought you say:

“acceptance” and “peace.”

Eventually, after a few breaths, the thought has completely disappeared. Keep your awareness on your breath. Continue to breathe deeply in and out.

The same fearful thought may soon return but this time it is much smaller and less impacting. You feel much less intimidated by the thought this time because you have already reduced your emotional reaction

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to it. You simply don't care that much about it. You are disconnecting your emotions from the thought.

Continue this exercise for any number of other disturbing thoughts that arise, always breathing “acceptance” and “peace” on them as they float away from your awareness in the radiant blue cloud.

This is a good exercise to practice daily, as it will strengthen your ability to disconnect from anxious or highly disturbing thoughts. Soon you will be able to recognize and label a disturbing thought immediately, and have no emotional reaction to it whatsoever. The thought will be nothing more than a split second flash on your awareness—then it is gone as you move your attention to what you really want to focus on. This does take practice and depending on the severity of the anxious thoughts, it will take time to fully release the emotional reaction to the anxious thoughts. The more you practice, the better you will become at it.

The more realistic the imagined scenarios, the more benefit you'll gain. Many people report very beneficial and soothing results from frequently using these simple visualizations. The mind is much

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like a muscle; in order to relax it needs to regularly release what it's holding. By visualizing the different situations, you allow your mind to release tension and restore calm. It's like sending a message to your brain that when you close your eyes and begin this process, it's time to let go of anything that it's been mentally holding onto.

I recommend that your daily visualization practice take place before going to bed, as that will enable you to sleep more soundly. Many people do these visualizations in some room other than the bedroom. That way, when they enter the bedroom and close the door, they leave the mental stress behind them. Visualization, as a tool for dealing with mental stress and problems of exhaustion, is very effective. If you do the above visualizations on a regular basis, you'll experience more and more calm.

Sometimes, unwanted anxious thoughts can be very persistent and you may need a stronger approach to tackle them. If that is the case I suggest you try a more direct approach. This approach has its foundation in what we have already covered but requires an extra bit of courage to complete.

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Back-up exercise for ending unwanted thoughts.

The very same principle of the 21 Second Countdown can be applied to tackling very intrusive anxious thoughts. You begin as you have done before with an attitude of complete acceptance toward the thoughts. You are not going to let the content of the thought shock or scare you; instead you are going to take a playful attitude toward the thoughts. **A light and playful attitude is crucial in order not to fall under the control of the thoughts.**

Next, you **demand** to have more of these anxious thoughts. You say to yourself, “Hey, I can make this even scarier than that! Imagine this and that happening! Didn’t think of that before, did you!”

You start to really liberate yourself from the thoughts by exaggerating them in a light-hearted manner. Now you are no longer the victim of the scary thoughts but rather you are in control and are directing them.

So, for example, if it’s a fear that you might lose control, you invite the thoughts in and actually demand that you lose control right now in a full on and humorous way. “If it’s going to happen” you think to

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yourself, “then let it happen now buddy – let’s go completely nuts!”

You visualize it all in great detail without holding back or getting shocked by the content of the thoughts. Instead of waiting to see what the next scary thought is that comes to mind, you take the lead and direct the thoughts yourself, always trying to make them worse. What you will find is that you are less scared by these thoughts as soon as you take control of them: “Isn’t there anything more I can terrify myself with?”

The important thing here is to not resist or control the thoughts in any way. Remember, these thoughts do not represent you or your real intentions. You should not feel guilty or bad for thinking them. They are the result of your active imagination, fueled by anxiety. The more you can be comfortable with your worst fears, the quicker you strip them of any power they had over you.

Stay with this exercise for as long as you can and then when you feel you have done enough work on it, stop and engage in something that really distracts you. Go have a conversation with someone, take a walk outside or go get some exercise. Do anything that gets your mind off the exercise you have just completed in order to give yourself a mental break from it.

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Please do not get upset if you do not get a result the first few times. You will need to practice this exercise a few times to see a result. It's not an easy exercise, as most people do not want to go that in-depth with these thoughts but if you have the courage and faith to try it, you will get excellent results.

You will know you have made great progress when these unwanted thoughts flash across your awareness without any fearful reaction from you. You are simply not bothered by them and therefore feel no sudden jolt of fear because of their presence.

This type of approach for dealing with unwanted thoughts is popular with many therapists and if you want to learn more about it, I suggest you read Dr. David Burns' book, *When Panic Attacks* (see the section on cognitive flooding). If you feel you need more specific guidance trying this approach, you might consider working with a local therapist who has experience in this field.

Next, we are going to look at additional tools for dealing with anxious bodily sensations.

Dealing with: Anxious Bodily Sensations

Life is movement. When you are in the flow, you feel confident, relaxed, and at peace with yourself.

Fear is the opposite. Fear is stagnant, heavy, and slow-moving. In extreme cases fear can completely freeze you, e.g., just after a sudden shock people say things like, “I just couldn’t think or move. I was frozen to the spot.”

Anxiety takes you out of your flow into a stagnant, sluggish feeling. People with general anxiety sometimes describe that feeling like a fog that mentally surrounds them or a heavy oppressing sensation. The anxiety causes them to feel out of sync or disconnected from the flow of life (movement). Their nerves are frayed and a simple worry or concern sends shock waves of heightened anxiety.

With this simple exercise, I am going to show you how to restore your natural flow and rhythm with life. This simple exercise is called the Symphony Technique. It teaches you how to process the general anxiety you feel out of your body and mind by using rhythm and movement. Use it anytime you want to shift that heavy anxious feeling. The audio for this recording accompanies the Panic Away Program.

Dealing with: Anxious Bodily Sensations

The Symphony Technique

Begin by rating your anxiety on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest. Make a mental note of that number as you will be coming back to it later.

Now, imagine yourself as the conductor of a symphony orchestra. You are going to learn how to conduct and move the stagnant anxious feelings in your body through rhythm and movement.

Begin by establishing a 4/4 rhythm by counting like this,

1 and 2 and 3 and 4

1 and 2 and 3 and 4

As you count, tap your feet on each number and move your hands as you imagine a symphony conductor would do. (If you are not alone you can do this in your imagination and just tap your feet, however it does work much better to do it physically).

Dealing with: Anxious Bodily Sensations

1 and 2 and 3 and 4

Now in this 4/4 time say the following:

-I accept and process my anxious thoughts.

(1 and 2 and 3 and 4), etc.

-I accept and process my bodily sensations.

-I accept and process my fear of panic.

-I accept and process my beating heart.

After saying the 4 sentences keep tapping and take two deep breaths and begin again.

These sentences above are examples; make up your own based on what you fear or the uncomfortable feelings you want to get rid of. They can be different sentences or all the same. Be creative with it but always try and keep the sentences short and in timing with the 4/4 rhythm.

Dealing with: *Anxious Bodily Sensations*

Now here is the important thing. As you do this you need to really get into the sense of movement that you are creating. You are in control; you are the conductor moving the inner sensations/anxiety with the wave of your hands and the tapping of your feet.

Allow yourself to feel all of the anxiety in its fullest. Stand up and move around if that helps you get more of a flow going.

By allowing yourself to feel the anxiety in this way, you start to accept it. By accepting it you start to move and process it. By moving and processing it, you will feel your confidence return as well as a sense of inner release.

There are no set rules on how long you should do this. You need to find what works for you, but start out by doing the exercise in groups of 4 blocks. So do 4 sentences followed by a few deep breaths and then begin again. Do this a total of 4 times then take a break.

Once you have finished, mentally check in and score your anxiety level. Again, give it a score out of 10. Why does this exercise work? It works for two simple reasons:

Dealing with: Anxious Bodily Sensations

A. It creates an internal movement. Movement processes your emotions and helps you feel more in control. You will feel a sense of release as you process the fear you are holding.

B. It gives you something to actively engage with. Rather than just sitting there passively ‘checking in’ every minute to see how you feel, you are now working through the anxiety and re-establishing your natural flow.

Life is movement. Use the Symphony Technique frequently to restore your natural movement and within a short period of time you will be feeling a great deal better.

The following short exercise ties in with the Symphony Technique by teaching you how to channel nervous energy into positive action. Once again, it is about moving with the anxiety you feel rather than against it.

The Coffee Cup Exercise

There’s a fine line between anxiety and feelings of excitement. Instead of robbing you of your confidence and drive, anxiety can actually motivate and excite you. The following exercise demonstrates a simple way to handle the nervous energy you feel. Credit for the exercise goes to Panic Away forum moderator, Kasey Pascarelli.

Dealing with: Anxious Bodily Sensations

When you feel anxious, accept the way you are feeling in that moment. Instead of getting upset by the anxiety, decide to turn it to your advantage.

You can turn your nervous energy into excitement and stimulation by pretending you have just finished a strong cup of coffee! Just like caffeine, anxiety stimulates your nervous system. Under its influence your mind is more alert and your body is primed for action, so why not take advantage of all that extra energy buzzing around your system and pretend it is simply the result of a caffeine kick?

If you wake feeling anxious don't analyze the way you feel, rather decide to let the nervous energy become your new kick-start to the day. Feel how alive and alert your body and mind are because of the anxiety. Now make the most of that nervous energy and use it to drive your day forward.

You could go exercise, clean the house, or get that report written. Do anything at all to channel that energy into something constructive. What you must not do is turn that energy inwards and worry about it. Turning inwards and analyzing the way you feel only creates more anxiety. Instead, push the energy

Dealing with: *Anxious Bodily Sensations*

outwards and move with it. Work in tandem with the nervous energy and what you will find is that it quickly transforms from feelings of fear into excitement.

Why do you think Woody Allen is so creative? He puts all of his nervous energy to great use by being creative. You can, too, by turning what is normally an uncomfortable feeling into a force of motivation and action.

So the next time you feel anxious, simply pretend you have just had a big cup of coffee and then channel that nervous energy to your advantage. This exercise is another example of how a small change in perception can transform the way your anxiety feels.

Dealing with: Morning Anxiety



I conducted an online poll with Panic Away members and 52% said mornings were when they experienced the most anxiety.

The problem of morning anxiety is connected to our mental state on waking. When we wake most of us feel quite sluggish. It takes a while for the body to switch from the sleep mode to being active and mentally alert. You will often hear people say that they are not a ‘morning person’.

Dealing with: **Morning Anxiety**

People with general anxiety find this sluggish morning feeling quite difficult, as they wake with anxiety and feel more vulnerable due to it.

It is also common to ‘check in’ mentally first thing in the morning to see how anxious you are feeling. The sluggish feeling in your mind and body does not feel positive, and that alone can trigger worries that the anxiety problem is not improving.

If you often feel morning anxiety, it is important to understand that it is common and that it should not be viewed as a setback or an indicator that you are going to feel like this all day. I’m going to outline a simple *7 Step Morning Routine* that everyone can use. If you follow this routine you’ll see a real change in your anxiety level.

1. Acceptance

When you wake, try not to overanalyze how you are feeling. If you notice that you feel quite anxious, accept the feelings fully and do not allow yourself to get upset because of the anxiety.

Dealing with: **Morning Anxiety**

Your reaction to morning anxiety will determine how long it stays. Don't upset yourself by reacting negatively to it, instead use the same approach as outlined in the *Coffee Cup Exercise* above. Accept the anxiety and channel the nervous energy you feel, into positive action!

2. Gratitude

Have a small notebook and pen beside your bed and as soon as you wake up jot down three things you are truly grateful for in your life. This short gratitude exercise will jump-start you into a positive mental state of mind. It is important to only jot down a few short sentences because if you make this exercise too time consuming you may not continue it everyday. Doing this one thing alone will be enough to change your mental state quickly each morning. It is a powerful state-changer.

3. Stretch

Step out of bed, open the window for some fresh air, and then begin some light stretching (You will find many excellent stretching routines online). Stretching sends a message to your body that it is morning

Dealing with: **Morning Anxiety**

time and it helps release muscle tension you may have built up over night. You will feel more flexible and, interestingly, less uptight mentally after some good stretches.

4. Shower

Next take a cold shower! No, it's not particularly pleasant, but it really kicks your mind and body into action. You will feel mentally much more alert and far less intimidated by any anxious sensations in your body. If that's too intense for you, then vary the temperature between cold and warm. Studies show our body's immune system benefits because the number of white blood cells produced increases with regular cold showers.

5. Breakfast

Be sure to avoid refined sugar, coffee, and caffeinated teas. Instead, have a cup of hot water with a slice of lemon. This is a really great way to give your whole system (in particular your liver) a healthy morning boost. Never skip breakfast, no matter how pushed for time you are. Be sure to eat a nutritious breakfast, as it will really help buffer you against feelings of stress as the morning progresses.

Dealing with: Morning Anxiety

Eat...

- Whole grains
- Low-fat protein
- Low-fat dairy
- Fruits and vegetables

If you're taking natural supplements, now is a good time to take them.

6. Don't hang around.

If you do not have something in particular to do each morning, then find something to do! The reason I say this is because if you are idle your mind will turn inwards and go back to 'checking in' on your anxiety. What you want is to be busy from the get-go and have a purpose to your morning. The distraction of having something purposeful to be doing is often the key to moving you out of anxious feelings faster.

Dealing with: **Morning Anxiety**

7. Don't rush

Try and avoid rushing out the door like a headless chicken. Rushing only makes you feel stressed and sends your body the message that you're under constant pressure. I'm sure that the few minutes you save by rushing out the door never really makes a big difference at the end of the day. You can do what needs to be done without putting yourself under unnecessary pressure. If you feel you can't afford extra time in the morning, then set your alarm clock earlier. Make it your time—time for you alone. By creating this space, you release the necessary calm to buffer you against stress for the day ahead. This time in the morning may well be the most important part of your whole day, so be selfish and protect it.

Dealing with: Insomnia and Night Panic



Nighttime can be particularly difficult for people with anxiety issues. Not being able to sleep can actually be quite traumatic for many people. The first thing you need to understand about sleep is this: it's not the amount of sleep you get that's important, but rather the quality of the sleep. Quality over quantity.

There are different worries that keep people awake. It could be the worry of an upcoming event or the worry of not being able to sleep and how that will affect your performance the following day. It's a vicious

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cycle. If, when preparing for bed, you fear you'll toss and turn all night, then you need to change your attitude towards sleep.

To break the cycle of insomnia, begin by not presuming you will sleep! That seems like the wrong attitude, but if you approach each night as just a possible opportunity to sleep, this helps remove the pressure you are placing yourself under. In a way, some people have performance anxiety when they think about sleeping:

Will I be able to make myself sleep tonight?

The answer is maybe yes, maybe no. If you're going through a period of sleeplessness a good night's sleep isn't guaranteed, for whatever reason, so you have to accept that for the moment. If you get one or two hours of sleep, that's well and good, and if you get nothing, then accept it and move on. Your acceptance will transform the frustration of not being able to sleep. Each night, as you go to bed, say to yourself:

I'm preparing for bed, but I won't try to force sleep. If it comes, it comes. If not, I won't beat myself up over it. This is a period I'm going through, but I'll soon return to normal sleep patterns.

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Every person goes through periods of sleeplessness from time to time. It's very natural. After a certain point, it's really the anger and frustration of not sleeping that keeps you awake, so let me emphasize the importance of accepting your temporary inability to sleep. Surrender to whatever may or may not happen during the course of a night, and you'll put your mind under much less pressure.

Here are some tips on how to best prepare for sleep and what you can do when you simply can't nod off:

- Have a warm bath with several drops of lavender oil before bed. Your muscles will start to relax in the warm water and the lavender oil triggers a calming response, which encourages sleep. If you can make a ritual of this each evening, you will condition your mind to prepare for sleep.
- Read fiction for a short period in bed before turning off the light. Fiction is a mental state changer. It stimulates the right side of your brain, (imagination/visualization) and helps to turn off the analytical left brain which loves to worry about tomorrow. Be sure the book is something light, nothing too gripping or you might never put it down! It needs to be fiction for this to be effective because fiction allows you to escape your daily thought patterns. So no newspapers, business books, or even Panic Away, just light entertainment that opens a window to sleep and imagination.

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- If you wake in the middle of the night, don't leave your bed—try to stay there. Getting up takes you further out of the sleep pattern. It's best if you stay in bed lying down, because that sends a message to your brain that it really is bedtime. If you're very awake, try reading some more of your novel and then turn off the light as soon as you feel sleepy again.
- I am encouraging you to avoid left brain thinking before bed. However, should you find your mind racing and that you simply can't stop obsessing about a certain matter, turn the light on, get a pen and paper, and start writing your worries down (*e.g., tomorrow I have to do X,Y,Z and I'm afraid I won't be well rested, and what if... etc.*). Continue to write down your worries until the exercise becomes quite boring.

Don't be afraid of writing pages and pages of nothing in particular. What you're doing is releasing the mental energy keeping you awake onto paper. You see, often one of the reasons we can't fall asleep is that our mind feels these worries are important to analyze over and over. The more worked up you get by the worries, the more your body gets stimulated, and thus sleep is harder to achieve. Writing down all your worries has the effect of saying to your mind:

Dealing with: Insomnia and Night Panic



Okay, mind, you think these are important. I've written them all down in detail. They won't be forgotten, I promise. I can come back to them tomorrow and deal with them then—but RIGHT NOW, let's sleep.

The mind can be like a small child who just needs reassurance that things will be dealt with and looked after. That's all it needs to let go of these mental worries. You then discover, in the morning, that almost all of the worries or concerns aren't big issues. Many of our worries are the workings of an overactive imagination.

- Dr. Dennis Gersten of San Diego suggests another approach for particularly restless nights. His approach ties in well with the philosophy of this course and you may want to experiment with it the next time you are dealing with a sleepless night. Try the following: As you lie there in bed, start by remembering a time in your life when you absolutely had to stay awake. Maybe it was an important exam you were studying for and you had to keep cramming through the night. Maybe it was staying up all night nursing your baby to sleep. Maybe it was when you were traveling through the night on a bus and needed to stay awake in case you missed your stop. I am sure there have been many different occasions in your life where you had to force yourself to stay awake.

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- Remember the weariness and the effort just to keep your eyes open. Remember how your eyelids felt like lead weights and you wished you could close them, even just for a minute. At that time, you could not give in to your urge to fall asleep; you had to fight hard to stay awake. Relive those memories and really try to remember exactly what that felt like.
- Now think about right now, and how good it feels to actually be in bed without the urgency to stay awake. Think of how grateful you would have been then to be where you are now, lying in your bed with your head resting on the pillow and the complete freedom to fall asleep. It feels really good to actually have full permission to fall asleep right now. There are no demands on you to stay awake. Stay with that feeling of gratitude for your bed until you drift to sleep.

Night Panic

People with anxiety disorders can sometimes be awakened at night by panic attacks. We know that most nighttime panic attacks aren't caused by dreams. Records of sleep polysomnography show that most panic attacks take place during the early sleep phase (phase II), not during the REM phase associated with dreams. This is different from nightmares. Nightmares happen during the second half of the night, so

Dealing with: Insomnia and Night Panic



we're often able to remember the content of these dreams. If you wake with a panic attack, implement the *21-7 Technique™*. That means using the *21 Second Countdown* to stop the panic developing and then the *7 Minute Exercise* to help you relax back to sleep.

It's important not to go to bed fearing you might have a panic attack. Go to bed confident that if one should arise, you'll successfully deal with it. That way, you don't put yourself under pressure to not have a panic attack. Many panic attacks are experienced at the very moment of falling asleep. Here's a description a woman gave of her experience:

Getting to sleep is a real problem. Just as I'm about to drop off to sleep, my body seems to jolt awake, like an electric shock, which then frightens me and keeps me awake for hours.

This jolt is called a hypnic jerk, or hypnagogic massive jerk. A hypnic jerk usually occurs just as the person enters sleep. People often describe it as a falling sensation or an electric shock, and it's a completely normal experience. It's most common when we're sleeping uncomfortably or overtired. There's been little research on the subject, but there are some theories as to why hypnic jerks occur. When we drift off into sleep, the body undergoes changes in temperature, breathing, and muscle relaxation. The hypnic jerk may

Dealing with: Insomnia and Night Panic



be a result of the muscles relaxing. The brain misinterprets this as a sign of falling, and it signals our limbs to wake up, hence the jerking legs or arms.

People turn hypnic jerks into panic attacks because they already feel nervous about their condition and the jolt scares them into thinking something bad is happening. Again, it's a fearful reaction to a sensation. Usually when these people jolt awake they get a fright and gasp for air, which can then turn into the fear of a breathing or heart problem while sleeping. If you wake like this, then simply understanding the nature of a hypnic jerk can strip the anxiety away from the experience. Reassure yourself that you're safe and that the jerk isn't something to worry about. It doesn't disrupt your bodily functions, and it doesn't put you in any danger. As a side point, people who have a fear of flying often experience this jolt on long-haul flights because they drift off to sleep in an uncomfortable position and then suddenly jolt awake. Jolting awake like this causes them more anxiety because they're on an airplane.

Dealing with: Phobias

A phobia is an irrational and excessive fear of an object or situation. Phobias are generally treated differently from panic attacks or general anxiety. For example, a fear of spiders is best treated through a process of exposure therapy: people are gradually exposed to their fear until they no longer fear the spiders. Exposure therapy plays a small role in the *21-7 Technique*[™], in that you're encouraged to engage in situations where you might experience panic. **The exposure here is not to challenge the situation, but rather the sensations.**

For example, people might have a fear of driving on a highway. Exposure therapy might teach them to get over that one particular fear by flooding them with exposure to highway driving. But what happens when that person turns around a month later and says, "I'm not afraid of the highway anymore, but now I'm terrified of bridges." It's much more effective to focus on treating the anxiety in terms of the fear itself rather than each and every situation.

Phobias that are closely related to an anxiety disorder are agoraphobia and claustrophobia. These are connected because the fear isn't about one specific thing, but rather about the way situations make the person feel. For example, agoraphobic people frequently don't like to leave their homes. It's not that

Dealing with: Phobias

they're scared of something in the outside world, but rather they fear the sensations they feel when they leave their safe zones. The same applies to people who experience claustrophobia. They're not scared of elevators per se, but rather the idea of not being able to escape the elevator or other situation in which they find themselves. Both agoraphobia and claustrophobia can be successfully treated using this program.

Social Phobias

Trembling Hands

Blushing

Nervous Sweating

Social interaction can cause many people to experience bodily reactions that make them feel highly uncomfortable around others. Common problems are blushing in public, sweating, and trembling hands. None of these are harmful in any way, but if people become overly conscious of these symptoms, it can lead to shying away from social contact, sometimes to the point of leaving their jobs. I'll describe the approach I teach people to help them end this problem. It is the same paradoxical approach as used in the *21 Second Countdown*. I'll use the example of a trembling hand, but the approach is the same for both blushing and sweating.

Dealing with: Phobias

I've communicated with many people—from dental hygienists to professional athletes—who are desperately seeking a way to stop their hands from shaking when they're anxious or under pressure. In such situations, their careers were directly impacted. Other people may experience trembling hands with less frequency, such as situations in which they have to sign their names in front of others.

The trick to ending this problem (as you might have already guessed) is using the opposite approach from what they're already been trying. Take, for example, the dental hygienist who immediately starts to shake as soon as the patient sits in the chair. It only takes the memory of previous shakes to start her hand trembling. She gets upset by the shakes, and she desperately tries with all her will to make it stop by tensing her hand and arm muscles. All the effort and stress only causes her hand to shake further.

To end the problem, she should reverse her approach. Instead of forcing her hand to be still with all her mental power, she should allow it to shake. In fact, she should encourage it to shake even more. If she can fully accept the shakes and encourage more of them, she ends the pressure she puts herself under, and with that the shakes begin to fade away. The effort used in trying to stop the anxiety actually caused more of it. The answer is found in moving with the experience not against it. This same approach works for nervous sweating and blushing.

Dealing with: Phobias

Note: if the hygienist didn't care what others thought of her shaking, then the problem would disappear overnight. None of these problems (blushing, sweating, trembling) are ever a problem if people are alone. The problem is directly related to how people feel they're being perceived in the eyes of others.

To ensure a complete recovery, you can train yourself to be less worried about the opinions of others. Tackling the social element of this problem is best done through visualizations. Each night, before going to bed, imagine yourself in a situation that would normally produce the reaction you're trying to stop. This time, however, see yourself responding in the new manner:

My hand is shaking, but I'm not getting upset or embarrassed.

My face is red, but I'm completely composed.

My brow might be wet from sweat, but it doesn't faze me.

You fully accept whatever way your body behaves, and you don't get upset. You might even make light of it to those around you. The whole situation passes without any embarrassment.

Dealing with: Phobias

This takes practice, but the goal is to override the idea of social embarrassment and replace it with acceptance and grace under pressure. Generally, people with social anxieties are too hard on themselves. In most cases, other people are never aware that there's a problem in the first place. The real issue is in your mind because you distort the reality of the situation. Follow the above exercise, and with some practice, you'll resolve the problem.

Dealing with: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

When a person is very mentally exhausted, anxious thoughts can develop into obsessions. This is known as obsessive compulsive disorder, or OCD. It has two components: persistent anxious thoughts and repetitive, unproductive behavior. This compulsion might be something like constant hand washing or other such similar repetitive behavior.

There are different levels to OCD. Some people have a very mild form, which might be a compulsion to have everything perfectly in its place. Or it might be more extreme forms, in which the person is very distraught most of the day, tormented by anxious thoughts, and performs elaborate rituals to help ease the anxiety. The rituals are a way for the person to feel in control. When the person carries out the ritual, he feels some sense of ease—however it’s a false sense of ease, because it isn’t long before the ritual has to be carried out again. In the end, the person becomes a slave to the ritual and the anxious thoughts.

If you think you might have OCD, it’s important to understand that it’s highly treatable and you can cure it. Accept that it’s going to take some time. You can start to tackle compulsive behavior by slowly exposing yourself to the thing that causes the behavior while not engaging in the associated ritual. In the case of hand washing, you might allow a bit of dirt to stay on your hands without running immediately to wash

Dealing with: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

it off. This is called exposure therapy, and it works well for some compulsive behaviors. When the person is less sensitized, the process becomes much easier because the anxious thoughts have less impact on the person's psyche.

Persistent anxious thoughts can be of an extremely disturbing nature. One typical example might be parental fears that they will harm their children in some manner (*this is common for both mothers and fathers who suffer from anxiety*). Thoughts like that would strike a bit of fear into a non-sensitized mind, but when the person is in a nervous, sensitized state, the disturbing thought hits with such severity that it rebounds hard and fast, causing great distress. I want to reassure you that the disturbing thoughts (regardless of the severity) are not something to worry about. They're the result of an active imagination coupled with sensitization and something you care deeply about. These thoughts persist because you react so strongly to them. If you didn't have a strong reaction, the thought would never bother you.

You need to follow the approach as explained in the section concerning dealing with anxious thoughts.

Dealing with: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Accept that this is not the sign of mental illness, but simply exhaustion. If you find your OCD too severe, seek the advice of a doctor and psychologist. Sometimes a short course of medication, in combination with therapy, can be the fastest route to get over what can feel like an insurmountable hurdle.

As a final point about OCD, don't be too quick to stick a label on yourself. Believing in a label like OCD can make a problem more solidified than it really is. Lots of people go through what would be clinically termed as an obsessive compulsive disorder without ever really knowing they had it. To them, it was just a period they went through. Labels do help to communicate ideas more easily, but often these labels carry an unnecessary ominous weight. As mentioned, anxiety is almost always accompanied by a level of anxious, disturbing thoughts, so if you experience such thoughts, don't feel you automatically have OCD.

Dealing with: Setbacks

When can people say that they've fully recovered from their anxiety disorder?

I believe people have reached the stage of full recovery when their confidence and feelings of success over anxiety outweigh their feelings of failure or despair. This is achieved for most people through continued practice and application of what's been taught in Panic Away. This is not to say they'll never experience anxiety again, but if they do, they'll move through it quickly with a strong sense of confidence. After several months they'll begin to forget they ever had an anxiety disorder.

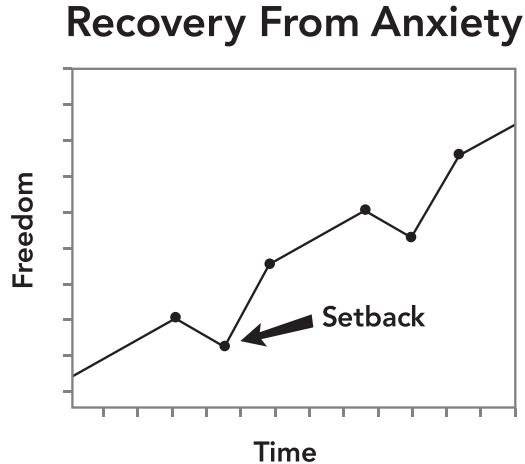
Expect Setbacks

I am going to tell you something now that is of critical importance to your recovery. **It is almost a guarantee that you will experience a setback after you have made good progress.**

There will be days in the beginning when you will feel fantastic and then suddenly you will wake up one morning feeling like you have made no progress at all. Please be aware that this is normal and do not let it upset you. If you understand that setbacks are commonplace, then you can be prepared for them when they happen, and this prevents you from feeling like you have failed. Take a look at the following chart

Dealing with: Setbacks

to see how setbacks form part of the recovery process. Notice how the setback is temporary and is quickly followed by further progress toward freedom.



Why do people experience setbacks when they begin to tackle their anxiety?

Setbacks happen because as you face your anxiety and the situations that make you feel uncomfortable,

Dealing with: Setbacks

the avoidant/protective side of your personality becomes active. When you decide to tackle your anxiety issue head-on, the protective side of your personality would rather that you left well enough alone. Your protective side doesn't like taking risks and feels better when you don't put yourself in situations that make you feel anxious. It's the part of you that says:

Let's stay in our comfort zone today. At least we're safe here.

This part of your personality has your interests at heart, but you know deep down that a life cocooned from all adversity doesn't lead to happiness. When you begin your healing journey, it will all be new and can feel like you're moving into unknown territory. You'll quickly master areas of your life that were causing you problems. Your protective side will take a back seat and watch with suspicion as you make this progress. Then, after a while, your protective side may become more active for fear that, with all this progress, a great fall must be just around the corner.

As you move upward and onward, this side of you gets scared and tries to put on the brakes. This creates a conflict and fuels feelings of anxiety. The feelings can be very intense and might be similar to what you've

Dealing with: Setbacks

experienced before—such as panic and general unease—or there may be new sensations never experienced before. You might have been doing really well for a week, but then your protective side pops its head up and says something like this:

Okay, well done. We're not worried about dizzy spells anymore—fine. But what's that ringing in your ear?

That sounds like trouble to me. . . LET'S GET WORRIED.

No panic attacks in a week—great. But don't be fooled. That means a really BIG one is about to pounce!

These thoughts undermine your confidence. Suddenly you're feeling vulnerable again, and the anxiety can return as your confidence dips, so you return to obsessing about the way you feel. This kind of response is natural in recovery, and if you've experienced a setback recently, I want to show you how to best deal with it.

The first thing to remember is that setbacks happen. Try to never let a setback convince you that you're not making progress. It doesn't mean that all your progress has been undone. In general, setbacks are inevitable, and you need to have an accepting attitude toward them.

Dealing with: Setbacks

Secondly, setbacks form part of your healing. To move beyond the anxiety, you need to work with the protective side of your personality and teach it that there really is nothing to fear. When setbacks occur, it's an indication that you now need to take your new understanding and work with this side of you which is resisting the change. You might want to think of this aspect of you as a small child who doesn't want you (the parent) to take risks or do anything out of your comfort zone. Talk to this part yourself. Reassure it that all will be well and that it's necessary for you to work through the anxiety in order to experience more freedom and happiness.

Setbacks can feel like a big step backward, but they're generally followed by rapid progress on many levels if you engage fully with this protective side of yourself. There's an opportunity here for you to create a new working relationship with your protective self, and this will really seal your recovery. When you educate your protective self that you're really safe and encourage it to take the steps with you, you become fully empowered to end your anxiety problem. All of your internal energies go in the same direction, and there's no conflict.

Persistence will carry you through all setbacks and ensure your success.

Dealing with: Setbacks

Keep your confidence intact. Build it on the past, on each time you've succeeded.

General anxiety disorder and (especially) panic attacks are probably the most frightening experiences a person can go through. In most cases, you feel like you've had a brush with death itself. That's no small feat to deal with while on your lunch break! Be proud of your experiences. You're not a cowardly victim, but a survivor of a terrifying experience—and what's more, you probably stayed at work or collected the kids from school. You continued living. Sure, there may be a few hairy anxiety memories in the past that you'd prefer to forget, but the underlying emotion to build upon is that you survived and you're here now, alive and living a new day.

There is a very simple tool used in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) that can be very effective to help you move through a setback quickly. It is called anchoring.

Anchoring means connecting with a positive experience from the past to create a positive state in the present. I want to show you how you can connect or 'anchor' a time when you dealt really well with your anxiety, and use that memory in the present to feel confident after any setback.

Dealing with: Setbacks

Creating Your Confidence Anchor

Recall a particular time when you felt anxious and then did or thought something that ended the anxiety, making you feel really confident and on top of the world as you no longer felt scared. This memory can be anything at all as long as the example feels powerful to you.

There may be a few examples you can choose from, e.g., the time you drove all the way home on your own, or the work party you went to that you managed to turn into a complete success. Maybe it was a flight you took, or a trip to somewhere you had been dreading. It can be any moment you faced your fear and won!

Once you have selected the most powerful memory, you need to imagine yourself back in that experience as if it is happening in this moment. What do you see and hear? What are you wearing? Get fully into the memory. Notice how the state you feel builds to a peak and then declines. That peak is the moment in your memory where you went, *"Yes, I have made a complete success of this situation—I am no longer scared, I feel full of confidence."*

Now repeat this memory in your mind's eye once again, only this time just as the state is about to peak,

Dealing with: Setbacks

clench your right fist and say the word “CONFIDENCE” to yourself.

Hold the state for a few moments, then release your fist and think about something else for a moment. Now, you have to repeat this procedure about five times, one after the other, in order to build a strong anchor. Repetition is essential and should take you about 20 minutes to complete.

You have just created your confidence anchor that you can fire any time you are feeling low and need a boost. All you have to do is clench your fist and think the word “*confidence*”. That action alone will connect you to the state of confidence that you experienced in your special memory.

Your anchor is something you can use anytime you experience a setback and need a quick boost in confidence. So for example if you are sitting at work and feel upset because you feel anxious again, clench your fist and say the word “*confidence*”. Connecting this way to feelings of success and confidence will override the upset you feel from a setback.

Anchoring is a very powerful tool, but if you prefer not to use it, then at the very least keep a **success diary**. A success diary is a private diary of all the times you successfully dealt with your anxiety.

Dealing with: Setbacks

This diary becomes an invaluable resource from which to draw strength. Writing successes down solidifies them and makes them more real in your mind. We all tend to forget our achievements, so having a diary to keep a record of them is a powerful tool to have anytime you need a boost of reassurance and confidence. It is an account of all your achievements—a record of the special days when you decided not to let anxiety stop you.

Confidence, just like fear, is contagious. Soon you'll find it spreading to all areas of your life, giving you a quality of life even beyond your pre-anxiety days. Anchoring or keeping a success diary will help you grow and expand positive feelings that will counter any setback.

Persist regardless of any setback. Turn a setback into an opportunity to solidify your confidence. Regardless of what happens, you know you can handle it. Regardless of how your body feels, you'll move through the anxiety and come out the other side smiling. If you remain persistent and remind yourself of your successes, setbacks can be turned to your advantage and you'll be strengthened by the experience.

Setbacks are delicate periods to move through, so you also need to be kind to yourself. Understand that they're the result of YOU just trying to protect YOU. Be your own best friend. When you take your

Dealing with: Setbacks

protective self by the hand and teach it that there's nothing to fear, you'll quickly march toward a greater experience of freedom. Recovery is not a straight linear process like healing a broken bone. Some days will be better than others—that's just the way it is, so don't get upset if you complete something successfully one day but fail the next. Keep your eyes on the end goal, and persistence will carry you there.

Turning the Corner

When you reach a point in your recovery where you go long periods of time without concerning yourself about anxiety, then you have turned the corner on your recovery. Days, then weeks go by, where you do not give it a second thought as the anxiety disorder distances itself further from you. Turning the corner like this feels very empowering as your confidence returns and you feel like your old self again, but always be aware that even during times like this you may doubt yourself. It is normal to have the occasional thought creep in where you question if your recovery is actually real and you fear the recurrence of future anxiety. **The worry of anxiety returning is a common concern after recovering from an anxiety disorder.**

The reason this worry is so common is because anxiety can have such a powerful grip on your life that when it leaves, it is hard to believe that it is really gone for good. Be careful not to exaggerate minor feelings of anxiety into full-blown setbacks. Expect to feel anxious from time to time and don't jump to the conclusion that your anxiety disorder has returned just because one morning you feel out of sorts.

The honest truth is that anxiety will make the occasional comeback and that is just part of life for everyone. No one is immune from stressful life events that can trigger anxiety; however, with your new understanding you can now move through it quickly with confidence and experience.

Anxiety Medication

If you're on anti-anxiety medication for your anxiety disorder, well done for having gone out and sought medical advice. Many who experience anxiety fear that a visit to the doctor will only lead to being told that their condition is much worse than they'd imagined. There's nothing weak about using pharmaceuticals to help you get through an anxious period. Two types of medication commonly prescribed for anxiety are minor tranquilizers (e.g., Xanax, Ativan, Valium) and anti-depressants (e.g., Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft).

Medication for an anxiety disorder can be beneficial if, like everything else, it's not abused and used as a short-term tool to become less sensitized. There are thousands of people who wouldn't be able to hold down a job or regain any sense of a fulfilled life were it not for prescribed medications. In my mind, the danger with medication occurs when the user becomes overly dependent on it and the very thought of forgetting to take it triggers anxiety. Most good medical professionals advise a proper treatment plan, ensuring that once users start to feel more in control of their anxiety, they'll then gradually decrease the dosage. Under no circumstance should such a patient eliminate pharmaceuticals completely without consulting a doctor.

You can perfectly use the Panic Away Program in conjunction with medication. When you feel you're making good improvements, discuss the situation with your doctor. Talk about the approach you've been

Anxiety Medication

using and, when you feel ready, discuss what steps could be taken to reduce and eventually eliminate the medication.

When someone starts a course of medication, I feel it's very beneficial to also work on the problem's psychological side, by using this method or seeing a therapist. Using medication alone can give people the impression that the drug is somehow keeping them safe. That's not the case, because nothing is really threatening them. The sensations are a bluff. All the medication really does is numb the person to the experience of the sensations.

Seeing a therapist in a one-on-one session can be very beneficial, because the human touch is cathartic. This is especially true in the case of OCD or where there has been some trauma. If you have a desire to get therapy, then I encourage you to see someone who uses cognitive behavioral therapy; this one-on-one therapy gets the most effective results. Try to find a therapist who comes recommended in your area.

Finally, before we finish, it's important for me to fully explain all the sensations associated with anxiety disorders. The reassurance found here will give you a boost of confidence to shake off any doubt that may be lingering in your mind.

A Round-up of the Usual Suspects

Anxiety Sensations Explained:

I have placed this section at the end of the program because it helps to first have an understanding of the course material before discussing the various sensations connected to anxiety. It goes without saying that all sensations causing concern should be investigated by your doctor to rule out possible causes other than anxiety. Doing so is not only important from a medical point of view, but it will help reduce anxious thoughts that something more serious might be wrong.

“Am I Going Crazy?”

It’s understandable to fear you may be going crazy when you suffer from an anxiety disorder. There’s so little public awareness of mental disease, so people often jump to extreme conclusions. These conclusions are usually based on misinformation and an overactive imagination.

The most commonly known mental health issue is schizophrenia—the word itself strikes terror within the average person. Schizophrenia is a major disorder characterized by severe symptoms such as disjointed thoughts and speech, babbling, delusions or strange beliefs (for example, sufferers often claim they’re receiving messages from an inner voice), and hallucinations. Furthermore, schizophrenia appears to

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have a largely inherited genetic component, so those with schizophrenic family members have a higher predisposition than those who do not.

Schizophrenia generally begins very gradually, not suddenly (such as during a panic attack). Additionally, because it runs in families, only a certain proportion of people can become schizophrenic; in other people, no amount of stress will cause the disorder. A third important point is that people who become schizophrenic have usually shown some mild symptoms (unusual thoughts, flowery speech, etc.) for most of their lives. Thus, if this hasn't been noticed yet in you, then chances are you won't become schizophrenic. This is especially true if you're over twenty-five, since schizophrenia generally first appears in the late teens to early twenties.

Losing Control

During a panic attack, some people are prone to believe they're going to lose control. This feared loss of control can be physical (e.g., that all your vital organs will completely lose the run of themselves and descend into chaos) or emotional/mental (e.g., that you'll lose your grip on reality). Those who hate social embarrassment tend to suffer from this fear the most. The feared loss of control could range from

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screaming in public to picking up a knife and killing the nearest and dearest person to you (not that we all don't think of this from time to time!).

Put your mind at rest! As scary as those thoughts may be, you're not going to commit any of these acts. Relax. The reason you experience those thoughts is because your body feels out of control. Your mind thinks that if your body is out of control, it's next on the list.

You're not going to lose it. In fact, I'm sure that with all the panic attacks and heightened anxiety you've experienced in public places, nobody even noticed that you looked uncomfortable. We are, by nature, social animals, and we dread to be seen in some kind of embarrassing situation. The idea of jumping from your chair and screaming for an ambulance during a business meeting may go through your mind, but it's unlikely to happen. Most people find a way to politely excuse themselves. In the end, even if we do embarrass ourselves socially, does it really matter? We have to learn to be kind to ourselves. So what if we cause a scene and great embarrassment? Life is too short to keep up with appearances all the time. In fact, the more honest you are with your fears, the less pressure you subject yourself to.

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Unreality

I'd like to discuss a symptom not often mentioned in anxiety literature—the sensation of unreality. Psychologists call this depersonalization. Many people who experience panic attacks and general anxiety become distressed by this sensation and feel they may be losing their mind. They report feeling disconnected, as if their world has become nothing more than a projection of a film. This often leads to believing that some permanent damage has been done to their brain, which is causing these sensations.

A typical manifestation of this depersonalization (unreality) is when you're having a conversation with someone and you suddenly feel alarmingly isolated and removed from the situation. Once the sensation arises, it can be so impactful that it takes days to leave the eerie feeling behind and stop thinking about it.

The sensation is caused by delayed perception and mental preoccupation. While under constant stress or anxiety, the buildup of stress chemicals in your system causes a delayed response in sending information between neurotransmitter sites in your body. This slight delay between experience and thought can create a momentary sensation of unreality. The same effects are experienced under the influence of marijuana,

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but people don't react with fear because they're aware that the drug is causing the sensation. It's when the sensation arrives while you're doing your tax return that things feel a little scary!

I mention depersonalization because the condition isn't often discussed, and I want to reassure those of you who may have experienced it that it's only a side effect of excessive anxiety—it will pass as soon as your anxiety level comes down. Once the mind and body return to a normal level of relaxation, your body then has the opportunity to dispel some excess chemicals, and the sensation of being disconnected from the world ends.

In combination with this buildup of stress in the body, people often become completely absorbed in mental activity, further fueling the feeling of separation from the world. It's very easy to start imagining all the terrible mental illnesses that this sensation could mean, but don't worry—you haven't caused any damage to yourself, and you'll return to the person you were before depersonalization crept in. You'll have to trust me on that.

The quickest way out of this disconnected feeling is to accept it fully for the time being and have faith that it will pass shortly. Relax into it regardless of how strange it feels. You can adopt this relaxed attitude

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because you know that you'll return to normal when you remove anxiety from the equation. Remind yourself that this is a phase you're moving through, so be patient and kind to yourself while you're experiencing it.

What really moves people out of this sensation quickest is adopting an attitude that all is well. And it is. These unusual sensations of depersonalization are a nuisance, but they'll pass. As I mentioned, not feeling connected to yourself in this manner is solely due to the anxiety in your system, and it's reinforced when you constantly check in to see how you're feeling. Checking in means that you could be having a conversation with someone, but part of you continually checks to see if the eerie feeling is there or not. It's like you're overanalyzing yourself all of the time, which can make you feel even stranger. I appreciate how uncomfortable it can be, but don't worry about it. It will leave, so don't let the thoughts sucker you into thinking you'll be stuck with this depersonalization feeling all your life. Those thoughts aren't valid.

The more you flow along with it and don't react, the more quickly you'll return to feeling more yourself. It takes a little practice, but that change in attitude makes a big difference in how you feel. You should also engage in physical activities like outdoor exercise when you feel this way. Activities such as walking,

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running, biking, swimming, etc., help to shift your attention from overly focusing on mental activity to that of the physical experience of your body. Physical pursuits get you out of your mind, so to speak, and into your body.

Disturbing Thoughts

Anxiety almost always comes with a level of disturbing thoughts. You might be driving with your children and then get a flash thought of losing control and crashing into an oncoming car. Another example is looking down from a bridge and suddenly getting terrified by the idea that you might lose all control of your senses and jump.

If you experience such thoughts, I want to reassure you not to worry about them, regardless of how extreme they may be. They're the result of an active imagination coupled with anxiety, and are often about something or someone you care deeply about. These thoughts persist because you react so strongly to them. If you didn't have a strong reaction, the thoughts would never bother you.

The scary thoughts are like a small five-year-old looking for attention and targeting something you care about to get a reaction from you. They occur to people who would never dream of doing the things they

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think about. It's just the fact of having the thoughts that shocks people and leads them to believe they're bad in some way.

The truth is that these thoughts are the by-product of an overactive imagination mixed with a good dollop of anxiety. It's the anxious reaction to the thoughts that keeps them going around and around. I explained this in the *Dealing With Anxious Thoughts* section, but here is a quick reminder:

Visually, it's like this: Thoughts float up in front of us all the time during our waking day. Normally, we ignore most thoughts and continue what we're doing. Other times, we really get stuck in the thought and examine it in detail, such as “*what I have to do today*” thoughts. When anxious thoughts arise, people generally whack them away and try to run from them. This never works, because the energy put into hitting away the thought instead powers it to rebound with even more force and intensity.

For the moment, your best way to deal with this is to accept the chain of thoughts as they happen. When “terrible idea X” enters your mind, you simply go:

There you are again! I'm getting totally bored by all this scare-mongering. It's not relevant to me or my life—but sure, go

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ahead and tell the awful idea again if it makes you feel better.

Talk to the thoughts as if they're visitors that have no relationship to your real self and you're simply being polite by letting them run. Don't force them away—that creates the rebound effect—but don't feel you have to pay too much attention either. The goal is to move your attention to what you want to focus on without reacting to the scary thought. That way your energy goes into what you want and not into what you don't want.

You know who you are and that these thoughts don't represent you, so don't worry—the very fact that you get so upset by the thoughts shows how different you are from the ideas that torment you. Another way to view the thoughts is as if they were school bullies trying to upset you by saying awful things about people close to you. If you get scared or annoyed, the bully continues to taunt even more. If you laugh and say, “Ummm, *sure, whatever,*” then walk away, the bully loses interest.

Acceptance is the key. Getting upset by the thoughts only fuels the inner tension further because you add more worry and stress to the problem. If you say to yourself that this is a period you're moving through and that it will work out fine, you'll move into that acceptance more easily.

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“Switching off” the anxious thoughts is best achieved by saying, “*Oh, very scary! Are you done yet?*” Then continuously bring yourself back to the moment or task at hand without getting annoyed for having these thoughts. What you really need to adopt is an attitude that all is well. And it is. These fears are a nuisance, but they’ll pass with the reduction of your general anxiety.

Depression

Depression is a very large subject. I will mention only how it ties in with anxiety, because that’s the focus of this course. When someone has been feeling anxious for quite some time, the experience can become very frustrating and lead to feeling depressed. If you never suffered from depression before, but did so after your anxiety disorder began, then it’s most likely the anxiety that’s causing you to feel so down. Depression, in this context, is driven by thoughts of a future full of anxiety and restriction. A once carefree person feels bound. In addition to having to cope with new restrictions, an anxiety disorder often comes with health fears, which contribute to further feelings of despair.

If you tackle the anxiety, you’ll see a marked improvement in your overall sense of well-being. As your

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anxiety problem clears, the depressed state turns to one of hope. Hope is the antidote to depression. It gives you a reason to keep pursuing your goal of an anxiety-free life. Persist with the Panic Away Program and your anxiety will lift. As it lifts, so will feelings of despair and depression.

It is important that if feelings of depression are a concern, please seek help from a medical professional. I also highly recommend you pick up a copy of Dr. David Burns' book *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. It has sold over 4 million copies and is the most frequently recommended self-help book on depression in the United States.

Breathing Problems

It's common for people with anxiety to mention fears about their breathing. Some feel that their breathing is very labored and shallow. These fears are almost always accompanied by a tight sensation in the chest or throat area. A frequent complaint is worry that they're not getting enough oxygen or that they might stop breathing altogether and feel forced to take conscious control of their breathing.

The chest or throat tightness that causes uncomfortable or shallow breathing is very common. It's actually

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the chest and throat muscles that are tense, and this gives the false impression that you're not breathing right or getting enough air. This can lead to panic and light-headedness, which confirms your fears of not getting enough air. You can see how a cycle of anxiety begins as one fearful sensation feeds off the other.

The breathing fear comes from feeling uncomfortable in that area and then having anxious thoughts about suffocating or fainting from lack of oxygen. Don't let it worry you. Believe me, you could spend every minute of the next ten years worrying that you'll stop breathing—and nothing would happen. What a waste of your time and energy.

Your body knows exactly what it needs, and even if you try with all your mental might to get in the way of it, you will keep on breathing. In fact, many people experience this muscle tension every day, but they don't panic because they don't have a high level of sensitization and general anxiety.

When you become overly conscious of your breathing, remind yourself that you won't stop breathing, no matter how many thoughts go through your head that say otherwise. When you get uptight about the tensions in your body, they persist and worry you even more, creating a cycle that's difficult to break.

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Send the fear a message that it's fine for the muscle tension to be there. You're not worried by it, and it can stay as long as it likes. It's not a problem, because you don't see any threat.

Say to that part of your body:

I understand you're tense. That's fine. The tension can stay there, and I'm going to continue to do what I'm doing.

Don't get into a situation in which you try to get rid of the tension with your mind. Simply allow it to be present. Accept the uncomfortable sensation, and then shift your focus back to what you're doing. If you feel that your breathing is too shallow, allow it to be shallow. Your body always compensates as it adjusts to expel excess carbon dioxide. The point to remember here is that your breathing is an unconscious process, and your body has always—and *will* always—look after that for you, regardless of how much your anxiety interferes. The more you can sit with the sensation and not react with fearful thoughts, the better. So to sum up, get comfortable with the sensations and your fear about breathing will end. When the fear ends,

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the muscle tension releases, leaving you feeling much more comfortable.

If you find that you simply can't stop worrying about your breathing, try to push against the fear more forcefully by demonstrating to yourself that there's no danger. You can do this by taking a deep breath and holding it for as long as possible.

Initially you'll feel anxious trying this, because you're already concerned about your breathing. After holding your breath for a short while, you'll be forced to release quickly and breathe in. As you release and gasp for air, imagine you're also releasing your fear in the process. Allow your breathing to return to normal, and then, when comfortable, repeat the process. Each time, mentally imagine your fear leaving you as you exhale.

This exercise trains you to feel more confident with your body's ability to breathe. It shows you that no matter how much you may attempt to mentally interfere with your breathing, your body is always in charge and looking after it for you. This fear is a perfect example of how your mental activity can get in the way of a natural flow.

When you learn to trust again in that natural flow of your body, you stop interfering and worrying—and a

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comfortable, natural rhythm returns to it. Reestablishing this trust in your natural rhythm and ability to handle stress is fundamental in recovery from an anxiety disorder.

Fainting/Passing Out

When someone experiences high anxiety or panic, it's very common to feel light-headed or dizzy. This sensation is alarming because it makes you feel very vulnerable. If you're alone, you might fear falling unconscious with no one to look after you. Or if the sensation happens in public, it can lead to feelings of vulnerability while surrounded by strangers.

The dizziness often felt during an episode of anxiety is caused by increased respiration. People tend to overbreathe (hyperventilate) when they're anxious, which can lead to dizziness or light-headedness. Dizziness can also be triggered by pressure to perform in situations. For example, you may think this:

I don't know why, but any time my boss asks me a question, I freeze up and start to feel dizzy.

Certain situations can also trigger anxious memories, like this:

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I felt dizzy the last time I was in an elevator; now every time I get in one, I start to feel a bit woozy.

It's very **uncommon** for a person to faint when feeling anxious or threatened. This is because fainting is the result of low blood pressure. When we faint, the body falls to the ground. This allows blood to be supplied easily to the brain, a clever safety mechanism. When you feel anxious, your blood pressure goes up, not down. Hence, fainting is unlikely because your brain has plenty of blood supply.

Panic results in a heightened sense of alertness, not fainting.

Think of situations where people are faced with imminent threats, such as a robbery or major catastrophe. People don't faint left, right, and center. They always respond with a heightened sense of alertness. They respond because their bodies have been primed to jump into action by adrenaline releasing into their systems.

Their hearts are beating faster, their breathing increases, and blood is flowing fast. This is a prehistoric response to threats that has been with us since early mankind. If cavemen fainted every time they saw a saber tooth tiger, mankind would have had a very short history.

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Quite simply, fainting when anxious is highly uncommon due to the amount of blood that's being circulated. Your heart is usually beating fast, so there's little worry that the brain would be short of a fresh supply.

Frequently, people who have fainted in the past tend to be particularly frightened by a dizzy spell because they feel that if it happened before, it's likely to happen again.

If you've fainted before and fear it might happen again, try to remember the circumstance you were in: Were you tired? Was the temperature very hot? Had you eaten correctly that day? Fainting can be the result of many different factors. Generally it has little to do with anxiety, and is more frequently associated with energy levels, diet, or temperature.

Some people tell me that, regardless of the facts I've stated, they still can't shake off the fear of fainting when feeling anxious. If you struggle with this fear on an ongoing basis, you need to disempower the fear. The next time you feel light-headed or dizzy and thoughts of fainting begin to trouble you, find a place

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to sit comfortably. Remind yourself of what I've written here, and then tell your body that if it wishes to faint, do so now. You give your body complete permission to faint if that's what's needed.

No one can faint on demand. What you'll find is that the fear evaporates quickly as you call its bluff. Sit there and say to your fear:

If you're going to make me faint, then let's have it now. But if not, then sorry, but I have to keep going and get on with my day.

Do this, and you'll quickly feel more comfortable and confident to continue what you were doing. Challenge the fear of fainting in this manner, and you'll soon find that the idea of fainting doesn't bother you anymore.

Choking Sensations/Tight Throat

Anxiety can cause a tight sensation in the throat that people often describe like a lump in their throat. The medical term for this is globus hystericus. This sensation is the result of muscle tension in the throat

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area. Although uncomfortable and at times upsetting, this sensation is not harmful.

For people who experience this in association with eating, I find that it's the thought of forcing a swallow that causes them to feel anxious. If you feel very uncomfortable while eating, the best approach is to simply chew your food and make no attempt to swallow. Just keep chewing. You'll find that you can't stop the process of swallowing—it's a natural reflex. By not feeling that you have to force a swallow, the pressure is off. Swallowing happens as a natural reflex if you simply keep chewing. You can have fun experimenting with this. Try to eat anything at all and force yourself not to swallow. It's almost impossible. This is a great approach for people who fear swallowing, because they don't have to put themselves under any pressure to swallow. When pressure is removed from the equation, the problem solves itself.

I believe a lot of people experience a lump in the throat due to a buildup of emotion. During emotional events, such as weddings and funerals, it's common to feel this sensation. And what's more interesting is that, when people express themselves (crying, laughing, talking), the swell of emotion dies down and the sensation ends.

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So if you feel this sensation on a regular basis, I suggest that you start singing or humming. Singing or humming to yourself for several minutes on a regular basis releases the muscle tension in the throat area. For this to be most effective, focus on the singing, not on trying to see if the sensation has gone. Like many of the anxiety sensations, the less you preoccupy yourself with it, the faster the issue is resolved.

Some might associate this “lump in the throat” sensation with a disease. In practice, real lumps in the throat, such as a cancer, are not always felt (this is one of the reasons that a tumor can get so big before it’s discovered). Nevertheless, if you’re concerned about your throat—or, in fact, any part of your body—always get a full medical examination. This is the fastest way to put anxious “what if” thoughts to rest.

Nausea/Fear of Vomiting

Anxiety has a direct impact on the abdominal region. It can make people feel anything from a mild jittery sensation (butterflies in the stomach) to physically sick. Most people tend to get more anxious when they imagine they might vomit, which worsens the sensation of anxiety, thus making it all the more likely to happen. The fear of getting sick makes the situation worse. This fear is driven by thoughts like this:

What if I get sick right here and now? What would I do? What would people think of me?

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It's more common for people to fear vomiting in social settings, rather than when they're home, because they think they don't have a safe place to retreat and feel exposed to social embarrassment.

If you feel sick in your stomach during an anxious period, it's important to not fight against the sensation or any fears you may have of projectile vomiting.

The solution is found in accepting the sensation in your stomach as it manifests and allowing it full permission to be present. Tell your stomach that it's fine to feel sick, and if it feels it's necessary to vomit, then it may do so and you won't try to force it from happening. The reason this approach works well is because as soon as you allow your stomach the freedom to feel uncomfortable, the abdominal muscles start to relax. You no longer resist the experience with fear, and your body can flow more freely and release the tension that causes your stomach to feel unwell.

In the early stages, while you're learning to apply this approach, you might carry a small paper bag with you (like the ones found on airplanes). The bag reassures you that if you get sick, you can do so in a discreet manner. This gives you more confidence to handle the situation. This approach takes a little

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practice, but with time you'll become more confident in allowing the sensations to be present without resistance—and after a while, you'll feel no need to carry a paper bag around with you. (To relieve excess abdominal tension, use the 7 Minute Exercise).

Heart Attacks

Here's a typical scenario for getting anxious about your heart:

While sitting at my desk, I was feeling edgy, and could feel my pulse rate increase. I kept working, and then I felt pins and needles going up my left arm. I immediately thought to myself, "I'm having a heart attack." Literally seconds later, my heart was racing. I then looked around to see if there was anyone at the office. I was by myself. . . I really thought I was having a heart attack or stroke. Knowing I was alone, with no one to help me, made me feel more desperate and scared. I ended up calling 911. After extensive tests at the hospital, they told me it was anxiety. Even though I know it's just anxiety related, I can't help worrying that they may have missed something. I've become paranoid and check my pulse all the time. I also get really frightened if my heart beats fast or skips a beat.

Most people who have experienced panic attacks at some point fear for the health of their heart. It goes

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without saying that everyone should investigate any unusual symptoms in their chest or heart. Heart disease almost always produces major electrical changes in the heart, which are picked up very obviously by an electrocardiogram (EKG). In panic attacks, the only change that shows up on the EKG is a slight increase in heartbeat.

If you're worried about heart problems, treat yourself to a full examination to put your mind to rest. If you've had a full medical examination and the doctor has cleared you, you can safely assume that you don't have heart problems.

The major symptoms of heart disease are breathlessness and chest pain as well as occasional palpitations and fainting. Such symptoms are generally related to the amount of physical effort exerted—i.e., the harder you exercise, the worse the symptoms, and the less you exercise, the better. The symptoms usually go away quickly if the individual rests. This is very different from the symptoms associated with panic attacks.

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Palpitations

Palpitations are short, abrupt periods in which the heart suddenly starts beating fast. If you're in a sensitive state, this can ring alarm bells because you fear a sudden heart attack. The more you panic, the faster the heart beats. It's therefore understandable why many people in this situation jump to conclusions and call for medical help. What you have to remember is that palpitations are perfectly natural and can often be caused by exhaustion or stimulants like caffeine. Your heart is an incredibly strong muscle, and it won't stop or explode simply because it's beating hard and fast. A healthy heart can beat fast all day long and not be in any danger.

Missed Heartbeats

The medical term for missed heartbeats is extrasystoles. A missed heartbeat is usually an extra beat between two normal beats. Given the pause that follows this premature beat, it just seems as if one beat was missed. And because the heart's lower chambers fill with a greater-than-usual amount of blood during the pause, the next regular heartbeat can feel like a bit of a jolt. When you feel this sensation, you often freeze and wait in terror to see if your heart is in trouble.

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Such missed beats are generally harmless. It can help to sit down when you feel this sensation, but if you wish to keep moving, do so. Exercise won't cause the situation to get worse, and don't convince yourself that going home to lie down is the only way to help the situation. If you retreat every time you feel an unusual sensation, that behavior can reinforce a negative idea that your home is the only safe place to be. Our hearts are not atomic clocks that always keep time; they speed up, slow down, or occasionally beat in an irregular fashion. People with anxiety are very keen observers of all bodily functions. From time to time, you may notice an irregular beat or two. This is nothing to get upset about.

People can convince themselves that if they worry enough about their heart, or concentrate too much upon its actions, it may somehow get confused and forget how to beat correctly. It's quite common for people who suffer from this type of anxiety to check in on their heart at regular intervals to make sure it's still beating away.

My aim here is to try and alleviate your fears about irregular heartbeats and there is good medical evidence to back this up. The New England Journal of Medicine recently published a study by Dr. Harold Kennedy, who found that healthy people with frequent irregular heartbeats appear to be no more prone

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to heart problems than the average population. The majority of even the healthiest people experience palpitations, missed beats, or pounding in the chest.

But if you simply can't stop obsessing about your heart, here are some tips:

- Get a full medical examination. If you don't, your mind will always bring up the “*what if something really is wrong*” card. When you get a clean bill of health, trust in the results and don't second-guess them. If you really must, get a second opinion—but after that, stop doubting your good health.
- Remember that your body has incredible internal intelligence. Simply telling your heart, out of panic, that it might stop doesn't mean that it heeds your fears. Learn to become more comfortable with your heart, and let it do its job. Listen to it when you're relaxed and also when you're exercising. The more comfortable you are with the diversity and range of your heartbeats, the more confidence you'll have in it.
- Allow your heart to beat in whatever rhythm it sees fit. Don't try to control the natural rhythms of your body by always insisting on a calm heartbeat. The more you allow your body to flow in the manner it so chooses, the faster it will return to a state of rest.

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Very often, your heart only wants to palpitate a bit, thump a few beats harder. Why? That's the heart's own business. It's your mind that interferes and panics, causing the adrenaline to kick off a longer cycle of rapid heartbeats. So from now on, make a verbal agreement with your heart that you're going to stop interfering and obsessing over its health and trust in it 100 percent. Then hand over the controls. Let go to whatever way your heart wishes to behave. By allowing the sensations to happen and simply getting on with your day, you release the anxiety that you hold around your heart as well as the cautious monitoring of every heartbeat.

Headaches

If you experience high anxiety or stress, it's very likely that you also experience headaches, or even migraines. Some describe their headaches as dull pain or a tight band around their heads. A migraine is usually experienced in more severity, sometimes associated with sensitivity to light, sound, and movement. If you work in an office, be attentive and notice if artificial light—such as from computer monitors and televisions screens—triggers migraines. Migraines in association with anxiety are very typical in office settings.

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The most common of all the various headache types is a tension headache. This is caused by a tightening of the muscles in the upper back, neck, and head.

Researchers in Taiwan have found that the majority of people, particularly women, with chronic daily headaches have either anxiety or depressive disorders. Anxiety can make tension headaches worse by increasing muscle tension, flooding the body with stress chemicals (such as adrenaline), and reducing the amount of “relaxation” chemicals (such as endorphins) in the body.

It’s beyond the scope of this course to discuss in detail possible cures for headaches, but I’ll briefly summarize some short- and long-term solutions. Your doctor is best able to advise you on how to treat your particular headache or migraine.

Short-term treatments

Short-term treatment options to provide pain relief include the following:

- Painkillers, such as aspirin or paracetamol (acetaminophen)
- Heat treatment, such as a long soak in a hot bath

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- Ice packs to the face
- A scalp, neck, and shoulder massage
- Microcurrent (TENS) and magnetic therapy
- Stress-relieving activities, such as relaxation, meditation, or hypnosis
- Exercise

Long-term treatments

If you feel your headache is directly related to stress and anxiety, then the best long-term strategy is to reduce the amount of anxiety you experience. Research has found that regular exercise can relieve muscle tension and help alleviate stress-related symptoms, such as tension headaches, and should also be included in your long-term strategy. Aerobic exercises—such as cycling, swimming, or walking—are good examples.

Blurred Vision

When frightened or anxious, the pupils in the eye dilate quickly, and this can sometimes cause blurred vision. Blurred vision can also occur when looking quickly between near and far objects, because the pupils change dimension.

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Blurred vision is also often caused by fatigue or when the eye muscles start to lose elasticity with age. Even though anxiety can frequently cause instances of blurred vision, it's important to visit your doctor for an eye checkup. For example, if the blurred vision occurs with a discharge, it may be conjunctivitis and need treatment. If something needs treatment, early detection can often result in correcting the problem.

Weak Legs/Jelly Legs

Anxiety creates the sensation of weak or “jelly” legs. When anxious, adrenaline is released into your body. The adrenaline can make sensitive people feel very weak in their muscles—especially the leg muscles, because they're supporting the body. You often hear people say that when they have to stand up and speak, they go weak at the knees and fear they might topple over. It's important to note, however, that the jittery sensation you may feel in your legs is not a signal that your legs are any weaker—they're not. In fact, your legs are being primed for movement, so don't fear that they'll go out from under you.

If you're out walking, then continue to walk; if you're standing in a line, continue to stand. There's no need to find a place to sit, and doing so often reinforces your anxiety about weak legs. If you train yourself to continue to do what you were doing, you'll quickly learn that the sensation of weak legs is an illusion

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and your legs are strong and well-capable of supporting your body. The more you challenge anxious sensations in this manner, the faster the sensation will disappear. Many of the anxiety symptoms are worsened by anxious thoughts about the sensation. For example, if you feel your legs go weak, you may jump to extreme conclusions:

Weak legs mean I'll fall over—and that means I must be about to faint!

When you think like this, the anxiety can then trick you into feeling dizzy, thereby creating an even greater cycle of anxiety. The answer, as you're now well aware, lies in accepting the sensation and moving on. Don't try to wish the sensation away or pretend that it doesn't exist. Simply say this to your body:

Okay, legs, I understand you're feeling a bit weak. But I really don't feel it's something serious, so I'm going to finish my walk regardless.

By not retreating, you build up your confidence to the point where you're not bothered by the sensation—which, in turn, creates less anxiety, resulting in fewer occurrences of weak legs.

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Tingling Sensations

When panic attacks begin, people often feel a tingling sensation in their body. The medical term for this is paresthesia. More generally known as the feeling of pins and needles, it's a sensation of tingling, pricking, or numbness of the skin, and it has no apparent long-term physical effect. Paresthesia is most commonly felt in the hands, arms, mouth, and feet. Don't be alarmed—this is perfectly natural to experience in connection with high anxiety.

Toilet Phobia

There are a number of different phobias related to the toilet, but here I'm going to discuss one of the most common: the fear of not getting to the toilet on time. No one should feel ashamed of this problem; it's common and can be overcome. This fear is almost always connected to social embarrassment, and it rarely happens in situations where other people are not around.

Anxiety can give people the impression that they have a weak bladder. When anxious, they may need to use the toilet several times. In most cases, there's no physical problem, and the frequency of needing a toilet is purely psychological.

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Toilet phobia is strongly connected to anxiety because it's the thought, "*How do I escape this if I need a toilet?*" that really triggers the phobia. People often run scenarios through their minds of not being able to reach a toilet on time and the social embarrassment this would cause. If you experience this fear when you leave home, I'll outline steps you can take to minimize the anxiety.

The solution lies in rebuilding confidence in your own body and putting less focus on the fear of embarrassment or ridicule. Start by putting yourself in situations where you know there are toilets, but position yourself far enough away so that it causes your anxiety be activated.

Let's take a shopping mall as an example. As you enter and the fear escalates, find a place to sit down. As the fearful thoughts surface, don't try to suppress them. Simply say to the thoughts that you're not worried by that scenario because you know you have full confidence in controlling your body. You work through the anxiety while seated. When the anxiety lessens, stand up; then walk slowly and calmly to the toilet. By the time you reach it, you might even find that you no longer need to go.

The important point is to move toward the toilet only when you feel that you—not the anxiety—decides

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when to go. If you keep running to the toilet every time you feel the urge, you reinforce the idea that you have no control over the situation. By working through the anxiety and going only when you're ready, your confidence in the ability to control your body increases tenfold.

You might want to begin by setting up these opportunities when you're alone. When you're with friends, fear of embarrassment can make it more difficult. As you practice this, you'll reach a point where you feel more confident in controlling your body's need to use the toilet. This takes practice and time, but soon you'll be able to go anywhere without this worry dominating your thoughts. Practice is key here. To learn more about toilet phobia, visit www.phobics-society.org.uk/condition_toiletphobia.php

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a form of gastrointestinal dysfunction, which is frequently associated with anxiety. Some of the common symptoms of IBS include stomach pain, a swollen abdomen, diarrhea and whitish mucous in the stool. The condition is the result of an exaggerated response of the colon, and the same things that worsen the symptoms of IBS can also trigger anxiety.

For example, consuming too much caffeine or alcohol can trigger a panic attack and also trigger symptoms

Conclusion

Awareness is like the sun.

Remember back at the start of the book when I wrote that anxiety will make you stronger? Once you move beyond this problem you become a bigger person than you were previously. Anxiety challenges you in a way that most people never get to experience. That challenge, when overcome, leaves you with an inner strength that you carry with you for the rest of your life. That is the hidden opportunity anxiety presents to you.

By now you may have realized that the tools taught in Panic Away can be applied to not only end anxiety but also to build greater awareness of yourself. **The central theme running throughout this program is the importance of acceptance.** Complete acceptance of who you are and how you are feeling transforms that which is troubling you and builds greater awareness of yourself. That awareness will allow you to grow and develop in many areas of your life.

To give you an example Tich Nhat Hanh said the following about treating anger but he could have equally been speaking about anxiety.

“Treat your anger with the utmost respect and tenderness, for it is no other than yourself. Do not suppress it—simply be aware of it. Awareness is like the sun. When it shines on things, they are transformed. When you are aware that you are angry, your anger is transformed.... Mindfully dealing with anger is like taking the hand of a little brother.”

Conclusion

Your recovery now lies before you. Take it one day at a time and diligently apply what you've learned here—soon you will find yourself living a completely new, confident, fearless life.

Your future will be bright. How do I know this? Because you now have the tools that are changing the lives of so many people. You've made the first step by reading to the end of this course. Now follow through and practice what you have learnt. Practice is essential!

Never for a moment believe that you don't have what it takes to be anxiety-free. Every single person can achieve this—regardless of age, background, or ability. All you have to do is make the decision to commit to your recovery. At this very moment it may feel like you're in a dark and anxious place, but know that where anxiety is concerned, it's always darkest before the dawn.

There's a calm not far from here,
Barry McDonagh

The Guest House - Rumi

*This being Human is a guest-house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,*

still treat each guest honourably.

*He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whom ever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from the beyond.*

-Rumi-

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Reduce general anxiety by practicing
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Breathing in thinking of your *heart-link*

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“Relax, Release”

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New '*Panic Away*' Supplement

In addition to using *Panic Away* I recommend you take our specially formulated *Panic Away* supplement. It contains a blend of all natural supplements recognized for their ability to facilitate relaxation and reduce feelings of general anxiety. To learn more visit:

www.PanicAway.com/supplement

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