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**MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT
PANIC ATTACKS**

"Mastery of Your Anxiety and Panic" by
David Barlow.

"From Panic to Power" by Lucinda Bassett

"Mind over Mood" Christine Padesky and
Dennis Greenberger

"The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook" by
Edmund Bourne

"The Relaxation and Stress Reduction
Workbook" by Davis, Eschelman, McKay

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***PANIC
ATTACKS!***

What Are They?

&

**Why They Are
NOT Harmful**



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A PANIC ATTACK IS NOT AN ILLNESS

- Another term for a Panic Attack is the “Fight or Flight Response”
- The Fight or Flight Response is not an illness
- The Fight or Flight Response is an adaptive (helpful) system built into our bodies
- The Fight or Flight Response enables our body to deal with a dangerous situation in our environment (including our internal environment)
- The first part of the Fight or Flight response is to recognize a danger - and sometimes our nervous system reacts to things that are not really dangerous (e.g. a rope in the grass may be seen as a possible snake)
- Sometimes scary thoughts can present a dangerous situation (e.g. worries about losing your job or failing a test)
- The Fight or Flight Response or Panic Attack is very uncomfortable.
- Some people having a Panic attack will worry that they are having a heart attack, or that they are going crazy. Those scary thoughts make the panic attack worse or last longer.
- People may fear having another Panic Attack & avoid places where they had them before or are likely to have them again. When this happens, it *IS* an illness: this is what we call Panic Disorder

WHAT HAPPENS IN A PANIC ATTACK

- The purpose of a Panic Attack is to prepare the body to FIGHT a danger or RUN away from it (FLIGHT)
- The heart will begin to beat stronger and faster in order to get blood to the muscles. People will often say they felt their heart was leaping out of their chest
- Breathing will increase (rate and depth) in order to put more oxygen into the blood so the muscles can exert more force.
- The digestive system shuts down to shift blood from digestion to the muscles.
- Adrenaline is released which increases muscle activity (this is the cause of the *trembling* many people associate with fear)
- Blood is shifted away from the surface of the skin and extremities (fingers and toes) to redirect blood to the muscles (and to reduce the risk of bleeding if you were actually in a dangerous situation). The result is you feel COLD
- Sweat is produced. Not because you are hot - but the body thinks you are going to GET hot as you fight or run away.
- Pupils dilate to let in more light, this creates a light sensitivity (uncomfortable or painful). Sometimes people report that things “looked odd” or the lights hurt their eyes.

STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH PANIC ATTACKS

- Recognize that it is a panic attack
- Try not to have the scary thoughts that it is a heart attack or that you are going crazy
- Talk to your family doctor to ensure that there is indeed nothing wrong with your heart
- Remind yourself that no one around you likely can see that you are having a panic attack
- You are unlikely to faint (unless you are prone to fainting) because the things that happen in a panic attack actually make it next to impossible to faint.
- Take 3 deep breaths
- Try sitting down and take a moment to collect your thoughts.
- Try not to leave the situation if you can because it can increase the likelihood of avoidance in the future (teaches you to run away)
- If you must leave, try to regain your composure and go back into the situation as soon as you can. (e.g. if it happens in the grocery store, go sit in your car until you calm down, but go in and get your groceries afterwards)
- Try to find the triggers for the Panic Attack
- Keep track of the thoughts you may be having before and during the panic attacks.
- Use Cognitive Behavioural Therapy strategies to deal with the thoughts.