

# When Panic Hits

Jennifer knew her response wasn't "normal." She dreaded Tuesdays. Her body became tense, her breathing was labored, and she felt faint. The nausea in her stomach made eating impossible.

Could she make it through another week of class? Oh, the course work wasn't difficult. Her grades were fine, but sitting in a closed room for three hours produced feelings of panic. Even before she left home, anxiety overwhelmed her. Her pounding heart gave way to cold sweats and a feeling of dread.

To control the panic attacks, Jennifer arrived 30 minutes before class started in order to secure a seat by the door. As long as a clear escape route was in view, she could manage her symptoms.

One week, Jennifer was late to class. Someone was sitting in her regular seat, and no other seats near the door were available. Too embarrassed to tell her professor, she screamed at the man occupying her seat. The man, stunned, got up and moved to the back of the room. Jennifer quickly sat down but was horrified by her reaction.

Panic is not a comfortable feeling. The intense physical and psychological symptoms associated with it are often frightening. You may even feel as if you will die or completely lose control. So what can you do to stop it?

Don't panic. Panic will not lead to a heart attack, suffocation, fainting or your going crazy. You may feel as if

these things are about to happen because of the physical sensations you experience. But these sensations will pass, and your health will not be endangered.

Don't tense up and try to resist the panic symptoms. Instead, recognize the symptoms, and tell yourself you can handle them. They will pass.

Repeat a positive statement over and over. For example: "I can ride this out. Nothing terrible is going to happen to me. I can practice relaxing right now."

Know what triggers panic attacks. There may be a specific set of circumstances that brings on panic. If you have a panic attack, try to record what was happening prior to the attack and see if you can find a common trigger. For example, panic may come every time you see your stepfather, feel enclosed, have to make a public speech or take an important test.

Temporarily leave the situation that is the cause of the panic. You don't want to run away from anxiety-provoking people, situations or things, but it is OK to leave for a short period of time, calm down and then return.

Talk to someone. This can distract you from thinking of panic.

Get up and move around. Physical movement may dissipate some of the adrenaline leading to panic. Also, try focusing on an object near you. Work a puzzle, play a game, repeat numbers in your head, sing—anything that takes your mind off the panic symptoms.

Think about something calming and peaceful. Picture yourself relaxed and in the presence of God.

Practice relaxation strategies. Try deep breathing and alternate muscle tensing and relaxing.

Eliminate stimulants from your diet. Caffeine, nicotine and medications can aggravate and trigger anxiety.

Consider anti-anxiety medications. These are not for everyone, but sometimes medication can combat anxiety and give you time to practice new coping skills. There are a number of options that can help, but you will need an evaluation by a qualified physician.

The most important thing to remember is that you will not die from panic, and you can overcome the attacks. Memorize scripture verses regarding fear and anxiety. God hasn't given you a spirit of fear, and He tells you not to worry or be anxious. Read Philippians 4:6-7,11-13; Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 27:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:7; and 1 John 4:18.

God promises to supply your needs, take care of you, be ever-present and help you. He always is true to His Word. So don't panic when you feel out of control and circumstances look bad. God has all things in His control. He will come through for you and move on your behalf. Trust Him. Believe what He says, and you will be set free.

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