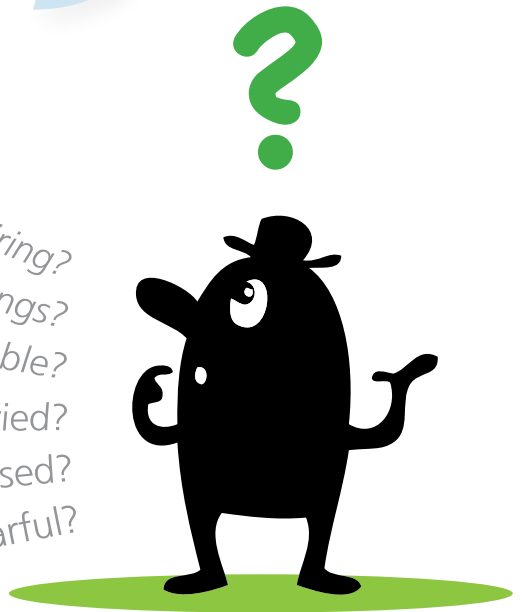


Time to Talk

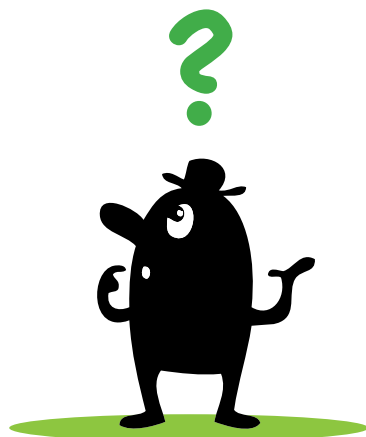
Panic and phobias – your self help guide

helping you make the
changes that you want,
so you can feel better

*Feeling sad or despairing?
Losing interest in things?
Irritable?
Worried?
Stressed?
Tearful?*



Getting started



By opening this booklet you are on the road to learning how to manage the symptoms of panic and phobias you have been experiencing. It can be hard to admit that things in our lives may not be how we would like them to be, and often understanding a problem is the first step to tackling it.

This booklet aims to help you understand and manage stress and worry better, so that you have the tools to help yourself.



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What is a panic attack?

Everyone knows what panic is, and it is common to feel panicky from time to time:

- You get the sense that you are being followed on your way home from a party, late at night.
- You discover you have had your wallet stolen.
- You are sitting an exam. You look at the paper and realise you don't know the answers to any of the questions.
- Someone runs in front of your car and you almost hit them.

It would be normal in any of these situations to feel a sense of panic. The feeling would be understandable and would pass fairly quickly.

A panic attack is a bit like "normal" panic, but different in a number of ways:

- The feelings seem to come "out of the blue" and are not usually related to the sort of frightening situation described above.
- The feelings are a lot stronger.

As the feelings are UNEXPECTED and STRONG they can feel extremely frightening.

Panic attacks affect people in many different ways, but there is usually a frightening feeling that something really awful is about to happen.

The truth is nothing awful is going to happen, as panic attacks are not dangerous.

Lots of people have panic attacks, although they can affect people in different ways. Some people have only one, others may have them for many years. Some people have them every day, some people only once in a while. If you were to ask all of your friends if they had ever had a panic attack, it is very likely that at least one or two will have had the same experience. They are quite common and NOT a sign of serious mental or physical illness.

Some non-serious physical conditions can cause symptoms similar to panic attacks. For example:

- Certain medicine taken together
- Thyroid problems
- Drinking too much caffeine
- Pregnancy
- Low blood sugar

If, after reading this booklet, you are concerned that your problem may have a physical cause and you have not yet had a check-up from your GP, then it may be a good idea to make an appointment.

Sometimes panic regularly occurs in response to a specific situation or a specific object. This is often known as a phobia.

What is a phobia?

A phobia is a very intense fear of an object or situation that is not actually dangerous. However, the fear of these can cause a great deal of distress and can severely restrict a person's life. A person with a phobia will go to great lengths to avoid the thing that they fear. For example, a person with a dental phobia may totally avoid going to the dentist even though they are in severe pain as a result.

Types of phobia

Phobia and avoidance of a specific object or situation

A person can develop a phobia of almost any object or situation. Objects commonly associated with phobias include fear of animals and insects (e.g. birds, dogs, mice, wasps or spiders). Specific situations include fear of driving, flying, heights or being in the dark. Phobias can also develop about social situations such as public speaking or social events such as parties. Extreme anxiety across social situations is known as “social phobia”.

Avoidance of places or situations that are hard to tescape from

Anxiety and panic can develop in situations where people feel trapped e.g. busy supermarkets, crowded buses or trains, traffic jams, or being outside and far away from home. As a result of this anxiety, the person might avoid the situation leading to a phobia developing. Fear of a situation where escape is difficult is called “agoraphobia”.

This booklet aims to help you reduce your panic attacks and phobias by helping you to:

- Recognise whether or not you are having panic attacks.
- Understand panic, what causes it and what keeps it going.
- Accept that panic cannot harm you.
- Learn techniques to reduce panic.

Recognising panic

How do I know if I am having a panic attack?

This may sound obvious, but it isn't. Sometimes panic feels so awful, and comes so "out of the blue", that people can't quite believe that it's a panic attack, and think it must be something more serious. The feeling of a panic attack can be so unusual that you may not even realise this is what is happening.

One of the most important first steps in overcoming panic attacks is recognising whether or not your symptoms are caused by a panic attack.

Panic affects your body, your mind and the way you behave. The following are some of the most common symptoms experienced by people having a panic attack. Some people may experience all of these symptoms, others just a few.

Your body (please tick those that apply)

- Your heart is pounding, beating fast or skipping a beat
- Your heart seems to stop, followed by a big thud, chest pains
- Changes in your breathing, either gulping air, breathing fast or feeling short of breath
- Pounding in your head
- Numbness or tingling in your fingers, toes or lips
- Feeling as though you can't swallow, feeling sick
- Feeling as though you're going to faint, wobbly legs

Summary

Panic attacks and phobias are very common and treatable. They are NOT dangerous and are NOT a sign of serious mental or physical illness.

Write down any other symptoms:

Your mind (please tick any thoughts or feelings that apply)

- Feelings of utter terror
- Feelings of unreality, as though you're not really there
- You feel anxious in situations where you have had a panic attack before

Frightening thoughts (please tick those that apply)

- "I'm going to have a heart attack"
- "I will collapse or faint"
- "I'm running out of air"
- "I'm going mad"
- "I'm choking"
- "I'm going to be sick"
- "I'm losing control"
- "I'm going to make a complete fool of myself"
- "I've got to get out of here"

Write down any other frightening thoughts or feelings:

Remember – these things never actually happen in a panic attack, but people sometimes think they will.

What you do / your behaviour (please tick any of these that apply to you)

- You avoid** situations that have caused panic or that you fear might cause panic, for example going shopping.
- Escape** as soon as you can when panicking, for example rushing around the supermarket to get out as soon as possible.
- Prevent** what you think is going to happen, by doing something to make yourself safe, for example gulping air if you think you are going to suffocate, sitting down if you think you are going to faint, lying down if you think you are having a heart attack, or scanning your body for evidence of something wrong.
- Seek help** – In one study, a quarter of all people having their first panic attack called an ambulance or went to Accident and Emergency, they were so convinced something dangerous was happening to them. Perhaps you have done this, or called out the GP?
- Cope** – People often try to cope with a panic attack by doing things they have found or have been told are helpful, for example, distracting themselves or trying to relax.

Write down anything else you do or don't do as a result of having a panic attack:

Whilst all of these things can help to stop a panic attack, as we shall see later, they can also become part of the problem.

If you have ticked quite a few of these symptoms, thoughts and behaviours, then it is likely that you are suffering from panic attacks

Summary

A panic attack is a strong feeling of terror that comes on very suddenly. Physical symptoms include pounding heart, fast breathing, shaking, and wobbly legs. People often have lots of frightening thoughts and think something awful is happening. They often try to avoid or escape the panic. But panic is not dangerous or harmful.

Understanding panic

What causes it and what keeps it going?

All of the panic symptoms described above are nothing more than an extreme form of fear. Fear is our body's natural response to a situation perceived as threatening. Fear can range from mild anxiety (which can be helpful when there is a goal, like passing an exam) through to full blown panic.

But why have fear at all when it's such an unpleasant feeling? In a way, it is a bit like pain. If you were to break your ankle it would feel very painful, which would be a warning to you not to walk on it. If you heard a noise downstairs at night, you might feel frightened, which is a warning that you might have to deal with a dangerous situation.

Fear is very useful. It prepares your body for action. This has been called the "fight or flight" response. So that when you feel fear, what is happening is that your body is preparing to fight or run away from the thing it feels threatened by or possibly to stay completely still and wait for the threat to pass.

If we take the example of the noise downstairs; let us suppose it is a burglar, as feared. You may wish to stay absolutely still, so as to prevent the burglar from attacking you. You might want to go and challenge him or you might need to run away should he come after you. Your fear response would help with any of these.

When you are frightened you breathe more quickly so that you can get lots of oxygen to your muscles. Your heart beats faster to pump the blood faster round your body. Your digestive system closes down to allow your body to concentrate on the more immediate threat. This is your body's normal healthy reaction to situations where you feel under threat. It is your body's alarm system.

The problem with panic attacks is that usually they occur when there is no obvious physical threat there at all. Your body is reacting as though it was about to be attacked when in reality it is not. In other words, it is a false alarm. It is a bit like the annoying smoke detector that goes off at all the wrong times, because it is sensitive to small amounts of smoke. Or the burglar alarm that goes off because of the cat. Or even the more annoying situation, the car alarm that is triggered when there is in fact no danger. The same can be the case with your body's "alarm" system. Sometimes it can be triggered when there is no real danger.

The problem is that our body's "alarm system" was designed many, many years ago, when people had to cope with dangers in order to survive.

Nowadays, we are rarely faced with the sort of life or death threats our ancestors faced. We have different threats, mainly related to stress. Financial worries, overworking, moving house, divorce for example, can all be stressful, and can raise our anxiety levels to the point where our "alarm system" is triggered. It is a bit like a "stress" thermometer – which when it reaches a certain level results in panic. Whilst a panic attack may be unpleasant, it is not dangerous but quite the opposite.

It is a system designed to protect us, not harm us.

Summary

Panic is a form of fear. It is our body's alarm system signalling threat. It prepares our body to fight or run away from danger. But as there is no physical danger it is a false alarm. A panic attack may be unpleasant but it is not dangerous.

What causes panic attacks to begin?

Panic attacks can start for a number of reasons.

Stress

As mentioned, stressful events can cause anxiety to go up, which may lead to the alarm system being triggered. Are you aware of any stress in your life recently, or over the last few years?

For example, work stress or being out of work, relationship problems, loss of a loved one, or financial difficulties. Please list any stresses that you are aware of:

If you feel you have had a lot of stress in your life recently, it might be useful to read our booklet "Stress and Worry, Your Self Help Guide". These can be obtained from your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

Health worries

Panic attacks often begin when a person becomes over-concerned about their health. This can happen for various reasons. Sometimes people with panic attacks have recently experienced the sudden death of someone they know or are close to.

They then become very worried about their own health, and look for signs that they may be developing the same illness. They are often aware of medical ‘mistakes’ where serious illness has not been picked up, and so become worried that there is something seriously wrong. This leads to raised anxiety. They then think the anxiety symptoms are evidence of a serious illness, which can result in panic.

Think back to when your panic attacks began. Do you know anyone who died suddenly, for example from a brain haemorrhage or an asthma or heart attack?

Other health-related reasons

Sometimes panic attacks occur for the first time during a period of ill-health. For example some viruses can cause dizziness. Pregnancy or the menopause can cause changes in the way our body works that can lead to a first experience of panic. Consuming large amounts of caffeine, or low blood sugar can also lead to feelings of faintness. Can you think of any “health-related” reasons for your panic attacks?

Difficult emotions

Panic attacks often begin when there are feelings from the past or present that are being “swept under the carpet”. Maybe you have relationship problems, or something from the past you need to deal with?

Out of the blue

Sometimes we just don’t know why panic attacks begin. Some people even have their first panic attack when they are asleep! It may just be that certain people, in certain circumstances respond like the over-sensitive car alarm. Their alarm system is triggered when there is in fact no danger.

In some ways, it is less important to know what has caused the panic attacks to begin with and more important to know what keeps them going.

What causes phobias to develop?

As we grow up we learn what is safe and dangerous from our experiences and from others. Many of us learn particular fears e.g. of dogs or heights. We may see a parent react with fear to something, or have a bad experience e.g. being bitten by a dog, or painful dental treatment. These can lead to phobias.

Phobias may also be more likely to develop in people who have not had the chance to learn helpful ways of coping with stress and anxiety, so they are more likely to avoid situations that are difficult. However, sometimes we cannot remember how the phobia started. This does not matter, because we can still treat the phobia successfully, in the same way that we do with panic - by addressing what keeps it going.

What keeps panic attacks going?

As you will remember, panic affects your body, your thoughts and your behaviour. All three work together to keep panic going.

Physical

Firstly, the physical symptoms can be part of the problem. For people whose breathing is affected by anxiety, something called hyperventilation can occur. This just means someone is taking in too much air and not breathing it out. This is not dangerous, but can lead to feelings of dizziness, and is often taken as further evidence that there is something seriously wrong.

Thoughts

Secondly, the physical symptoms and anxious thoughts form a vicious cycle that keeps panic attacks coming back again and again. Also, when you focus your mind on your body, this can lead you to notice small changes and seeing these as a threat.

People who have panic attacks often worry that the physical symptoms mean something different from what they really do. Examples of some of the most common misinterpretations are shown in the table opposite:

What you feel	Reasons this is happening	Common fears
Eyes go funny Blurred vision Tunnel vision Feel unreal	Eyes trying to focus to fight danger	Brain haemorrhage Going mad
Breathing changes	Body trying to take in more oxygen to fight or run away	Choking or suffocating Running out of air
Chest pains	Muscles held tight ready to fight	Heart attack
Heart pounding	Increase flow of blood through the body	Heart attack
Pounding in head Headache	Increased pressure of blood flowing through body for extra energy	Tumour Haemorrhage
Numbness or tingling in fingers or lips	Blood diverted to muscles	Stroke

People often find it hard to believe that our thoughts can produce such strong feelings, for example fear. But if we believe something 100% then we will feel exactly the same way, as if it were true.

Another way thoughts can affect panic, is when someone starts to worry that they are going to panic in situations where they have panicked before. This, unfortunately, makes it more likely to happen again.

Behaviour

Thirdly, how a person behaves before, during and following a panic attack has a big part to play in whether panic attacks keep happening. The avoidance, escape, and safety behaviour described earlier all add in to the vicious cycle.

The vicious cycle of panic

These physical symptoms, thoughts and behaviours form a vicious cycle, which keeps the panic attacks occurring over time.



Summary

- Fear is our body's way of coping with a threat – preparing us to fight or run.
- Panic attacks and phobias can begin for a number of reasons:
 - stress
 - health worries
 - during a mild illness
 - because of difficult emotions
 - fearful experiences
 - out of the blue
- They are kept going because of the vicious cycle of
 - physical symptoms
 - thoughts
 - behaviour
- By avoiding, escaping or preventing panic attacks, you may
 - never find out that nothing terrible was going to happen
 - dread going back into the situation, because you fear another attack
 - lose confidence in your ability to cope alone

Can panic attacks really harm me?

We have spent a lot of time looking at recognising and understanding panic, because this should give you all the information you need to be able to accept that panic attacks are not harmful. If you can do this then you have come a long way to being able to end your panic attacks.

To what extent, sitting here now, do you believe that your panic attacks mean that something awful is going to happen (0-100%), for example, heart attack, stroke, fainting, choking, suffocating?

.....%

Next time you have a panic attack, can you rate at the time how much you believe something awful is going to happen?

.....%

What techniques can help me cope with and reduce panic attacks and phobias?

The good news is that panic attacks are very treatable. You may find that your panic attacks have already started to reduce because you have begun to recognise and understand them, and accept that they are not harmful.

As we have seen, panic affects your body, your mind and your behaviour. It makes sense to try to deal with each of these. You may find some techniques more helpful than others.

Summary

Panic attacks are not harmful

Not everyone finds the same things helpful. Also, if you have been having panic attacks for a while, it may take some time for these techniques to work. Don't expect miracles straightaway, but keep at it and you should see the benefits soon.

Your body

There are at least two things you can do to help with the physical symptoms of anxiety:

1. Relaxation
2. Controlled breathing

These techniques are helpful for a number of reasons:

Panic attacks often start in periods of stress. These techniques can help you deal with stressful situations better, and reduce overall levels of anxiety.

- They can “nip anxiety in the bud”, stopping the cycle that leads to full blown panic by reducing anxiety symptoms and preventing hyperventilation.
- They can be used when avoidance is being cut down, to help you cope with situations you fear.
- Being relaxed and breathing calmly is the opposite of panic.

To begin with, it is best to practice regularly when you are not anxious. Look on it as getting into training. You would not enter a marathon without training for a while first!

Relaxation

People relax in many different ways. It might be that looking at your lifestyle would be helpful. What do you do to relax? Write down six things you do, or could do, to relax; for example, swimming, reading, and walking. As well as finding everyday ways of relaxing, there are special relaxation techniques which can help with the specific symptoms of panic.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

We have already seen that one of the things that happens when you panic is that your muscles tense up. To help yourself you should try to relax your muscles whenever you start to feel anxious.

Relaxing in this sense is different from the everyday ways of relaxing, like putting your feet up and having a cup of tea (although that is just as important!). It is a skill to be learnt and practised.

There are relaxation tapes / CDs, and sometimes classes, which can help. Yoga classes can also be useful. Your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner can recommend materials, so please ask at your next appointment.

Relaxation CDs teach you to go through the main muscle groups in your body, tensing and relaxing your muscles. The CD will come with instructions and some people find them very helpful. For further details on relaxation please see the booklet in this series "Stress and Worry, Your Self Help Guide".

Remember – Relaxation can help reduce symptoms of panic, but it is not preventing something terrible happening – because nothing terrible is going to happen, whether you relax or not.

Controlled breathing

As we saw earlier, when someone becomes frightened they start to breathe more quickly, so that oxygen is pumped more quickly around the body. However, breathing too fast, too deeply or irregularly can lead to more symptoms of panic, such as feeling faint, tingling and dizziness. If breathing can be controlled during panic, these symptoms may be reduced and so the vicious cycle described earlier can be broken. You must breathe more slowly.

If you breathe calmly and slowly for at least three minutes, the alarm bell should stop ringing. This is not as easy as it sounds. Sometimes in the middle of a panic attack, focusing on breathing can be difficult. One of the effects of over-breathing is that you feel you need more air, so it is difficult to do something which makes you feel as though you are getting less!

Again, practise while you are not panicking to begin with. This technique will only work if you have practised and if it is used for at least three minutes. It works much better in the very early stages of panic. Practise the following as often as you can.

Fill your lungs with air. Imagine you are filling up a bottle, so it fills from the bottom up. Your stomach should push out too.

Do not breathe in a shallow way, from your chest, or too deeply. Keep your breathing nice and slow and calm. Breathe out from your mouth and in through your nose.

Try breathing in slowly saying to yourself: "1 elephant, 2 elephant, 3 elephant, 4..."

Then let the breath out slowly to six: "...elephant, 5 elephant, 6 elephant".

Keep doing this until you feel calm. Sometimes looking at a second hand on a watch can help to slow breathing down.

Remember – Even if you didn't control your breathing, nothing awful is going to happen.

Your mind

There are at least four things you can do to help with the way your mind fuels a panic attack:

1. Stop focusing on your body
2. Distract yourself from frightening thoughts
3. Question and test your frightening thoughts
4. Try to work out whether something else is making you tense

Stop focusing

Try to notice whether you are focusing on your symptoms, or scanning your body for something wrong.

There really is no need to do this and it makes the problem far worse. It may be helpful to use the next technique to help you stop the habit. In particular, focus on what is going on outside rather than inside you.

Distraction

This is a very simple but effective technique. Again, you need to keep distracting yourself for at least three minutes for the symptoms to reduce. There are lots of ways you can distract yourself. For example, look at other people, and try to think what they do for a job. Count the number of red doors you see on the way home. Listen very carefully to someone talking. You can also try thinking of a pleasant scene in your mind, or an object, like a flower or your favourite car. Really concentrate on it. You can try doing sums in your mind, or singing a song. The important thing is that your attention is taken off your body and onto something else. Use what works best for you.

Distraction really does work. Have you ever been in the middle of a panic attack when something happened that totally took over your attention, for example the phone ringing, or a child falling over?

Remember – Distraction breaks the vicious cycle, but it is important to remember that distraction is not preventing something terrible from happening. In fact, as distraction works, this is evidence that nothing awful was going to happen after all. For example, could the fact that the phone rang really have prevented a heart attack?

Question your thoughts

Sometimes, rather than distracting yourself from your anxious thoughts, it is more helpful to challenge them. In the long run, it is most helpful to challenge your worrying thoughts, so that you no longer believe them.

For thought challenging you need to do two things:

1. Work out what your anxious thoughts and worst fears are. Everyone's are different. You should already have a good idea from the work done so far.
2. Start to challenge these thoughts and come up with more realistic and helpful thoughts.

Once you are aware of the thoughts and pictures in your mind, ask yourself:

- What is the evidence for and against them?
- How many times have you had these thoughts and has your worst fear ever happened?
- Do your experiences fit more with panic or with something more serious? For example, if thinking about panic brings a panic attack on, is it likely that a stroke or heart attack could be caused in this way?

If you can come up with more realistic helpful thoughts, write them down and keep them with you. It is often much more difficult to come up with these thoughts when you are actually panicking.

Below are some examples of unrealistic and unhelpful thoughts, with more realistic alternatives given opposite.

Unhelpful or unrealistic thoughts	More realistic thought
I am having a heart attack	I have had this feeling many times and am still here.
I am going to faint	People having panic attacks are unlikely to faint. I have not fainted before.
I am going mad	The feelings I am experiencing are panic - they are nothing like going mad.
I will make a fool of myself	I have panicked before and no one has ever noticed. People are busy getting on with their own thing.

Whilst it is really useful to challenge thoughts in this way, probably the best way to challenge the thoughts is through the things we do, which we will address in the next section. Before looking at how we can alter our behaviour to help reduce panic, it is useful to consider one other way in which your mind may be contributing to panic. Not through unhelpful anxious thoughts, but because there may be other things bothering you, as mentioned earlier.

Remember – panic can arise as a result of difficult feelings not being dealt with. It may be helpful to work out whether anything like that is bothering you. Is there anything from your past that you haven't sorted out that is preying on your mind?

Are there difficulties in your relationship? Do you feel angry or sad? Has someone or something upset you, or is something troubling you? Panic is less likely to happen if you face up to emotional difficulties, either through talking to a friend or a health professional (for example your GP, Nurse, or Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner).

Behaviour

Finally, challenging what you do is probably the most helpful way of overcoming panic. We have already talked about how avoidance, escape and safety behaviours keep panic going. Therefore, it makes sense that in order to reduce panic you need to reduce these behaviours.

Put simply, what you need to do now is test out the situations you fear most to prove to yourself that what is written here is true: panic attacks cannot harm you.

This is best done, not all at once, but in a planned way. Ideally, this should start off with a small experiment. It's difficult to believe something just by reading it. What you really need to do, little by little, is to prove to yourself what is really going on.

It is important to remember that whatever you do or don't do, the panic attack will stop. Just like any other alarm would.

First of all, work out what behaviours you need to tackle:

Avoidance

For example, if you are frightened of being alone, or visiting a supermarket, try gradually spending a little bit more time on your own, or going to a small shop. Does your feared disaster actually happen? Now you have some evidence that you didn't go mad/die/faint, the next step is to spend a bit longer in the situation, more often. You will probably feel anxious to begin with, as you have learnt to be anxious in certain situations which you may have been avoiding for some time.

Graded practice

What is graded practice?

When we are afraid of a situation or object such as spiders, meeting people or going out, we will often try to avoid it. Avoidance does relieve anxiety but only for a short time. Avoidance can often lead to long-term difficulties because a vicious cycle of anxiety and avoidance builds up. Graded Practice is useful to break this cycle. It teaches you to slowly confront the feared object or situation, one step at a time, until anxiety falls.

There are three main principles of Graded Practice:

1. It starts gradually with something that you think you can manage.
2. It is prolonged. It should last for about an hour a day so that your anxiety will fall.
3. It is carried out regularly at least once a day.

How do I do graded practice?

1. **Make a list of all the things you avoid**, then try to describe why you avoid them. For example if you are afraid of spiders, what size of spider makes you anxious? Does it make a difference how close it is to you, where you are, whether you're with someone else? For instance, you might be OK with small spiders but can't cope with large spiders in the same room as you.

And you might be less anxious if someone is with you. By describing your fear in detail, you can draw up a plan of manageable steps to overcome it. Each step should feel just a little harder than the last. Starting with the easiest, you can work out some small, safe, achievable steps, gradually building up to your target. This is called a Graded Hierarchy or Graded

Practice; an example can be seen below which describes how Jane overcomes her fear of driving. (Robert and Alice are her husband and daughter)

Target: To be able to drive alone or with Alice for at least half an hour.

Step 1: Sit in the car on the drive.

Step 2: Sit in the car on the drive with the engine running.

Step 3: With Robert in the car, drive it onto the road and pull up

Step 4: With Robert in the car drive around the block.

Step 5: Drive around the block on my own.

Step 6: With Robert in the car, drive to the local shops and back.

Step 7: Drive to the local shops and back on my own.

Step 8: With Robert in the car, drive Alice to playschool.

Step 9: Drive Alice to playschool on my own.

Step 10: Go on an half an hour journey on my own.

Step 11: Go on an half an hour journey with Alice.

Remember, the first task has to be achievable, so ask yourself:

“Can I imagine myself doing this with a bit of effort?” If you answer *“No”* then make the task easier. It is essential that you do not take risks: the aim of Graded Practice is to build on a series of successes, so you have to plan for success. Remember that each challenge provides an opportunity to use your coping skills (relaxation, breathing, distraction etc.)

- 2. Start out with the easiest thing on your list.** Practise each step using your coping skills, until you can manage it without difficulty. Then, and only then, move on to the next task. Don't be put off by feelings of anxiety – it is only natural. Remember that you are learning to master anxiety instead of avoiding it.

To be helpful, graded practice has to be:

- Regular and frequent enough for the benefits not to be lost (try to practise every day for approximately an hour if possible).
- Rewarding. Recognise your achievements and learn to praise yourself.
- Repeated until the anxiety is no longer there. If you find that a task is too difficult, don't give up or feel that you have failed. Instead, look for ways of making the task easier – perhaps as two or three smaller steps. Expect setbacks from time to time as everyone has good and bad days. When this happens, think about your task. Did you over-estimate what you could do and make the task too difficult? Did you practise when you were feeling unwell or tired? Did you have other things on your mind so that you could not put enough effort into your practice?

3. Keep a record of the anxiety you feel at each step. A suggested format is shown for you opposite. You could use the notes section of this booklet for record keeping. Keep doing this until your anxiety falls. Only when you can see and feel your anxiety reduce to 0, or near enough, should you move to the next step. A useful way to rate your anxiety is to score 0 for no anxiety at all and 10 for the worst anxiety you have ever felt.

Don't forget to give yourself credit for your achievements, no matter how small. Try not to downgrade your successes and try not to criticize yourself: encouragement works better! In this way you will manage to reach your goals and face your fears with confidence.

Target:			
Date	What are the steps you took?	(0-10) Anxiety rating	Comments

Escape

Note which situations you are escaping from. Do you stop eating a meal half way through in case you are sick? Or leave the supermarket without your shopping? Try staying in the situation until your panic starts to go down. What will you have learnt?

Safety behaviours

Try to notice all the things you do to make yourself feel safe, big and small, and gradually cut them out.

Do you stand absolutely still to stop yourself having a heart attack? Walk about instead. If you normally sit down to stop yourself fainting, try staying upright. What happened? What did you learn?

Write down some experiments you could try and what you found out afterwards, following the example below.

Safety behaviour and purpose	What you do instead	What did you learn
Lie down when panic comes on to prevent heart attack	Run up and down stairs	I did not have a heart attack even though I ran up and down the stairs
Lean on shopping trolley to prevent fainting	Walk without trolley, use basket instead	I did not faint even without the trolley

By testing out your fears in this way, and finding out that your worst fear never happens you will gradually become more and more confident. Your panic attacks should become fewer and fewer and less strong when they do come.

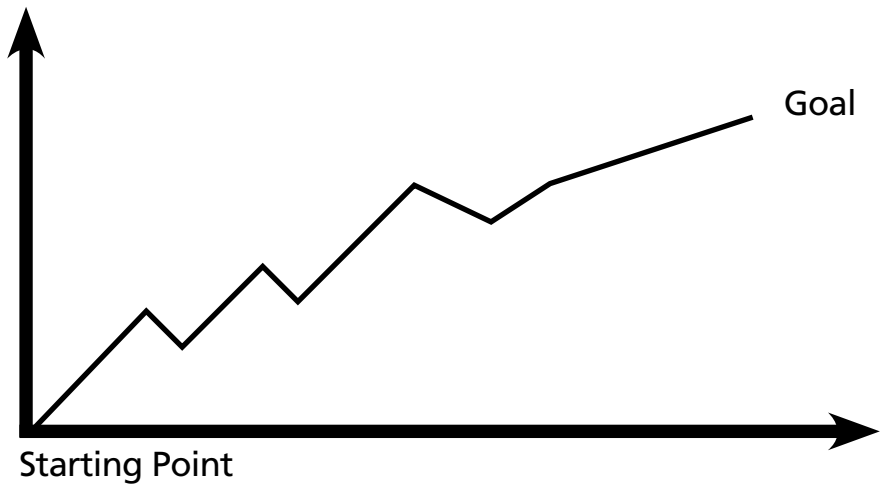
Summary

- Practise relaxation, slow breathing, distraction and thought challenging when not anxious until you have learned the techniques.
- Remind yourself during a panic that you have panicked many times before and nothing awful is going to happen.
- Use distraction, relaxation and slow breathing to help you get the panic to go away.
- Challenge your unrealistic thoughts during a panic attack, using some more realistic thoughts that you have written down.
- Try not to avoid, escape or use safety behaviours, instead test out what really happens.
- Use graded practice to tackle the things you are avoiding, one step at a time.
- Have positive goals that you want to work towards.
- Try to sort out any worries or troubles that you have. Talk about them; don't sweep them under the carpet.

Coping with Setbacks

Most of us get through our problems in a series of ups and downs.

The diagram below illustrates the progress you should expect:



"Just when I started to make progress and things were going well, I had a setback and I was back to square one. I needed help from my husband to start again, but I soon made up the ground I had lost and I'm still going forward. I still have one or two setbacks but I keep working at it"

Expect setbacks, they are normal. When a setback happens, remember that they are to be expected. Try and focus on the progress you have made so far. You know you have done it once, so you can do it again.

Your WELLBEING Plan

In order to feel better and to stay well, it is important to continue to look after your mental or emotional health just as you would your physical health. It can be helpful to see yourself as being on a **journey towards wellbeing**. As part of this journey, it is important to **continue** using what you have learned during your sessions in the future to help you stay well, and to improve your wellbeing further. This section will help you to review what your difficulties were, what you did that helped to improve things, and what you can do to stay well and improve how you feel in the future.

1. What difficulties did I ask for help with?

- What were my goals?
- What things did I want to work on?

2. What was keeping my problem(s) going?

- Behaviour e.g. avoiding situations or people
- Thinking e.g. always imagining the worst
- Difficult situations or life events e.g. relationships, work problems

3. What progress have I made in achieving my goals? How did I do this?

4. What ideas and tools have I learned that have helped me?

5. What obstacles might lead to a setback or make it harder to stay well?

e.g.

- Stressful life events / situations
- Less motivation and thinking negatively

6. What would I notice first if I started to have difficulties again?

e.g.

- Changes in the way I think e.g. always imagining that things will go wrong
- Changes in my behaviour e.g. avoiding things, drinking.
- Changes in how I feel physically e.g. feeling more tired or run down
- Changes in how I feel e.g. tearful or irritable

7. What can I do to start using the strategies I have learned to help me feel better again? Who can I talk to?

e.g.

- Talking to friends or family, making time to exercise regularly

Further advice and support

The techniques described in this booklet focus on how our thoughts and behaviours can have a big effect on whether we feel stressed or worried.

Most people can benefit from self-help, such as this booklet.

Your GP or Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner may also be able to give you further help in dealing with these problems.

Further reading on managing stress and worry is available in your local library as part of the Books on Prescription scheme. Ask your GP or Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner about this.

Some people may be prescribed medication for treating anxiety. This should only be taken for short periods to get over specific anxiety provoking situations. A lot of people find these medications helpful, although they are not a cure, and in the long run learning to manage your anxiety without medication is the best outcome.

If you have any queries about medication you have been prescribed, you should discuss this with your GP. Alternatively, you could telephone NHS Direct for information on 0845 4647.

Further reading

Many of the ideas in this booklet are discussed in further detail in the following books, some of which are available to borrow as part of the Books on Prescription scheme in local libraries (for more information ask your GP or Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner).

Useful reading

Overcoming Panic (2007) D. Silove and V. Manicavasager

Overcoming Anxiety (1997) H. Kennerley

Overcoming Anxiety – A Five Areas Approach (2003) C. Williams

Further support

Useful organisations

Anxiety UK

Zion CRC

339 Stretford Road

Hulme

Manchester M15 5FQ

Tel: 0161 227 9898

Opening hours: Mon–Fri - 10.30am–4pm

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

This is a self-help organisation run entirely by sufferers of anxiety and their carers providing help for people with anxiety and specific phobias. It has a website providing information, chat rooms, and contacts for local self help groups for agoraphobia, panic and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

Triumph over Phobia

P.O.Box 1831

Bath BA2 4YW

Tel: 01225 330353

www.triumphoverphobia.com

This is an organisation running groups nationwide. Groups are run by lay people and generally by ex-sufferers. They follow a structured self-treatment, self-exposure programme. A group runs locally in the evenings. To join, contact Triumph over Phobia on the above number.

No Panic

93 Brands Farm Way,

Telford TF3 2JQ

Freephone Help Line: 0808 808 0545

Free Information pack: 0800 783 1531

Office No: (01952) 590005

www.nopanic.org.uk

This site provides valuable information for sufferers and carers of people with Panic, Anxiety, Phobias and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Its purpose is to provide members with support, advice and a chance to meet like-minded people and make friends along the way. NO PANIC offers a confidential helpline staffed by trained volunteers, open every day of the year, 10am–10pm (from 10pm–10am there is an answer phone service only).

Websites

www.livinglifetothefull.com

Online life skills resource using a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) self-help approach. Sign up for free.

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Free self-help programme teaching Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) skills to people vulnerable to depression and anxiety.

Emergencies

If you are in crisis, especially if you feel at risk of harming yourself or someone else, contact your GP or, out of hours, attend Accident and Emergency, where you will be seen by someone who can discuss your difficulties with you.

Alternatively, you could contact:

Sussex Mental Health Line - 0300 5000 101

24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Samaritans - 08457 90 90 90

Confidential emotional support, 24 hours a day, for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair, or are feeling suicidal.

Notes

**This booklet is yours to keep, so,
please make use of it again and again**

To contact **Time to Talk**
Sussex Community NHS Trust,
please telephone your Locality Office

Crawley office

(Crawley area)

Tel: 01293 843 300

Mid Sussex office

(Burgess Hill, East Grinstead, Haywards Heath, Hurstpierpoint)

Tel: 01444 251 084

Horsham office

(Horsham, Storrington, Steyning, Henfield)

Tel: 01403 227 048

Worthing office

(Worthing, Shoreham, Lancing, Littlehampton)

Tel: 01903 703 540

Chichester office

(Chichester, Bognor, Arundel, Pulborough, Petworth,
Midhurst, the Witterings, Selsey, Southbourne)

Tel: 01243 812 537

www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/timetotalk