

10 If unfamiliar situations increase your anxiety level, as they do for many panic sufferers, **prepare for new situations in advance:** visit a classroom *before* the first day of the semester, try out your presentation on your roommate *before* you face the entire class, review how you'll handle an uncomfortable social situation "in your head" *before* you actually encounter it. You'll have an easier time of it, and you'll be far less likely to experience panic.

Practicing difficult situations in advance is know to reduce anxiety. In fact, formal treatment for panic attacks often involves exposing yourself gradually and *repeatedly* to selected situations, or to specific sensations of panic. While it's beyond the scope of this flyer to describe that form of treatment in detail, a counselor trained to treat anxiety, or a soundly-based self-help book such as Master Your Panic and Take Back Your Life, referenced below, can guide you through the process.

11 Recall a time you handled a similar situation well, or try to bring to mind a past success and the good feelings you experienced at that time.

Let your *own* confidence emerge and help you put panic right back where it belongs – *out of your life*.

12 Get mad. Vow not to let panic win this time. *You deserve better.* A strong competing emotion can often drive out panic; you simply don't have "room," or energy, for both. In fact, there's some evidence that *suppressing* anger and other strong emotions, like grief, can *evoke* panic; *becoming more aware of feelings*, by contrast, can send it packing.

So talk with a counselor, confide in a friend or family member, perhaps start a journal. Find a private place to express your reactions to your new life, and watch panic depart.

13 Count backward from 20 and with every number, picture a different image of someone you love, something that pleases you,

something that calms you. These might be images you recall from the past, or those you only imagine.

This strategy, too, not only refocuses your attention, it boosts upbeat, secure feelings – a wonderful antidote to panic.

14 Remind yourself that a **panic attack always subsides.** Always. No one can sustain intense levels of panic indefinitely. Panic attacks are anguishing to experience, but they *will* subside, even without any specific action on your part. But seeking assistance, reading more about panic and using these strategies can help you to overcome your attacks more rapidly and with far less misery. So pick a strategy, try it out today and send your panic packing!

From MASTER YOUR PANIC AND TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE! Twelve Treatment Sessions to Overcome High Anxiety (Second Edition), 1998, by Denise Beckfield, Reproduced by permission of Impact Publishers, Inc., P.O. Box 910, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406. Phone 1-800-246-7228

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www.uww.edu/stdrcscs/uhcs

Corner of Prairie and Starin
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Hours

Monday-Friday 8:00 - 4:30; summer & evening hours may vary.

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SEND YOUR PANIC PACKING!

You're seated quietly in a classroom, or eating in the dorm cafeteria, perhaps walking across campus with friends. All of a sudden, your heart begins to pound, you feel dizzy and faint, your hands start to tingle and a wave of terror descends over you. You're certain you're on the verge of fainting, having a heart attack, dying -- or at the very least, going crazy.

What just happened? Chances are, you just had a panic attack, an event that's surprisingly common among college students. In fact, a recent survey of college-aged females found that close to 50% had experienced at least one panic attack.

Panic often hits in reaction to separation from loved ones and familiar places, so college is a prime time for it to make its appearance. Many other students escape full-blown panic but experience anxiety when faced with exams, classroom presentations, financial worries, roommate problems or the myriad of other challenges that face students on their own for the very first time. There are a whole host of resources available to help students with anxiety or panic, beginning with the programs and services offered through your college counseling center, and anyone having difficulties is strongly encouraged to seek services. But in the meantime, is there anything you can do *this very minute* to control panic and anxiety? Yes, there is!

The "quick tips" in this brochure are based on proven principles from the field of anxiety management and can be surprisingly effective, offering temporary relief to "ride you over" until you can seek out a more systematic attack on your anxiety. Use them the instant you sense the first curling sensation that says "panic" and you may even be able to *stop your panic before it starts*.

1 First and foremost, be aware that **panic can't hurt you**. It isn't dangerous, and it doesn't mean you're crazy, no matter how it feels! In fact, panic attacks make biological sense - even though they may *feel* completely senseless.

You might think of a panic attack as your body's reaction to a *minor* threat as though it's a *major* emergency -- the result of an exquisitely sensitive nervous system, possibly combined with early life experiences that may have taught you to overestimate the likelihood of danger in different situations.

During a panic attack, your body reacts as though you're in danger, releasing adrenaline and noradrenaline. This in turn produces a host of alarming sensations - a pounding heart, and urge to flee, difficulty thinking straight and felling of impending doom. The problem, of course, is that during a panic attack, the body's alarm system kicks in when it's not needed. Though you may *feel* as though you will, you *won't* faint; you *won't* have a heart attack; you *won't* do something crazy or out of control. *And you won't die*. Reminding yourself of those facts can reduce the frightening sensations of panic.

2 Take a "time out" and slow down. Slow your rate of breathing, slow your racing thought, slow your entire body, head to toe. Then *slowly* resume your previous activities.

When you panic, your body, your mind, your emotions -- literally *everything* -- speeds up. And you feel out of control. Deliberately *reversing* the process, starting with your head and moving downward from there, not only slows you down -- the exact *opposite* of panic - it puts you back in charge.

3 Picture a person you trust, someone who believes in you, supports you and cares about your well-being. Now imagine that person is with you, offering encouragement.

Panic attacks often reflect feelings of being alone, bereft and fearful of your ability to cope on your own. *Remembering* and *experiencing*, the presence of another can relieve those feelings of abandonment. So let someone you

trust "take you by the hand" -- and let your panic slip away.

4 If there are places, available, **take a stroll**. If there are people available, **talk** with one of them. Better yet, do both!

Walking can help you "burn off" some of the excess adrenaline that's released when you become anxious. Talking with others can lift your spirits, refocus your energies positively and help you feel connected to the human race in a comforting, encouraging fashion. Try it -- it really works!

5 Sit down and **take several slow, deep breaths**. Pretend your stomach is a huge balloon and inhale it to enormous dimensions. Take at least four seconds to inhale, through your nose, and at least four more to exhale, through pursed lips, as though you're whistling. Continue this for several minutes, trying as you do so, to consciously relax your muscles.

Anxiety leads invariably to rapid, shallow breathing - *even when you're not aware of it*. And that leads directly to many of the symptoms of anxiety -- dizziness, confusion, numbness or tingling in your hands and feet, trembling and muscle aches, even altered perceptions of reality at times.

The *fastest, most foolproof strategy* to eliminate the *physical* symptoms of intense anxiety is to alter your breathing -- to slow it down and deepen it. In fact, use the method several times a day to keep anxiety low and prevent attacks arising in the first place!

6 **Occupy your mind with an absorbing task**: outline the sociology chapter you just read for class tomorrow; put on your headphones and listen to that new CD everyone's talking about; start researching the paper that's not due for two more weeks! Or simply focus on the present, on concrete objects around you, making a game on noticing details of every object you see.

During a panic attack, your mind is consumed with catastrophic thoughts about what's happening to your body, or about imagined disasters to come. These catastrophic thoughts provide the fuel for

further anxiety. To "de-fuel" anxiety, you need to interrupt the catastrophic thoughts. Distracting yourself by thinking about something else is one way to do that.

Listen to music, phone a friend, invent a delicious daydream, recall a happy time in your life in great detail -- anything to focus your mind on what's happening in the environment rather than on your body; on what's happening in the present, rather than the future; on something other than disaster. You'll interrupt the spiraling of anxiety and can eliminate, sometimes even *prevent*, the symptoms of full blown panic.

7 **Picture a relaxing scene** using all your senses. *Now put yourself into the scene*. Involving yourself in a relaxing image calms your body, relaxes your mind - and helps put an end to the symptoms of panic. Making the scene as vivid as possible, by using all five senses and by putting yourself into it, simply adds power to this panic-busting strategy.

8 **Take a giant yawn and stretch your body**, head to toe. A yawn and stretch is another way to interrupt your rapid breathing and escalating symptoms. The yawn literally forces air into the lower 25% of your lungs, and the stretch releases the tension in your muscles. After a good yawn and stretch, you can "start fresh."

9 **Bring to mind the image of a person you admire** and imagine yourself to actually *be* that person. Think as they might think, act as they might act, even *feel* as they might feel.

This strategy will lighten your spirits, inspire feelings of strength and comfort, and help you focus on something more adaptive than your fears. It's a powerful combination, far more positive than panic.