

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!

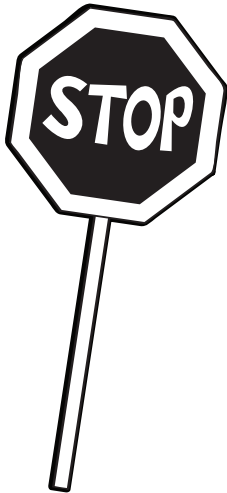
The Panic Away Program is responsible for helping many thousands of people worldwide end their anxiety disorders. At the core of the Panic Away Program is the 21-7 Technique™. You can think of this technique as first aid for anxiety. This technique is made up of two separate components. You have the 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

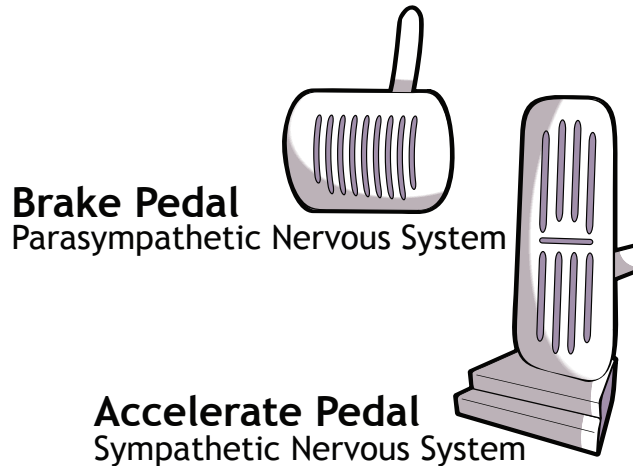
When confronted with danger, the brain sends signals to the automatic nervous system. This system is responsible for gearing the body up for action, as well as calming the body down and restoring equilibrium. To carry out these two vital functions, the autonomic nervous system has two subsections: the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

The 21-Second Countdown

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

The 21-Second Countdown

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

The 21-Second Countdown

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.

This is the end of the free Panic Away chapter

BUT I totally understand that you may still want to trial the full program further before paying the full price. I am going to offer you something special that visitors to our website don't even get. You can trial the entire digital Panic Away program for just \$4.95 for a full 30 days. If you do not get the results you hoped for, just email us and you will not be billed the remaining amount (\$63).

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Barry McDonagh

P.S If the above link does not open please type into your browser.