

Panic and Phobias

*We are all afraid of something. Fear is a natural part of life, and it can be helpful.
But when fear of something becomes extreme—panic—and leads to the anticipatory fear
and attempts to avoid this something—a phobia—it is disabling.
Learning how to manage this extreme anxiety brings profound relief.*

- Are you limiting yourself and your life, avoiding experiences others enjoy or basic activities of daily life, because of an unreasonable fear of some thing or situation?
- Phobias and Panic are two of the most straightforward examples of the mind controlling our larger experience. They are the fear of fear that happens when you feel out of control of your situation or surroundings, before you learn more about yourself and to manage and control your symptoms.
- If you think your extreme anxiety may have to do with your physical health, see your physician. Symptoms of panic can be similar to those with conditions involving blood pressure, heart functioning, blood sugar, thyroid, or other. However, most people who have panic have no medical crisis or condition: you will not die from panic itself, nor will you go “crazy.”
- Many people with phobias and/or panic become extremely sensitized over time to the physical symptoms of anxiety, such that even exercising—which increases the heart rate and breathing intensity, induces sweating, and can be accompanied by shaking or dizziness—can trick them into thinking they are panicking and trigger the whole cycle.
- Learning to tolerate the experience of anxiety, and to minimize its negative effects on you over time is the most powerful tool against panic and phobias. You do this by experimenting with anxiety-provoking situations, investigating your anxiety history and re-training your thoughts and reactions.
- Work to understand how your phobia grew: in a safe place, ask yourself to what is it connected? What images and thoughts arise? Make a timeline of the symptoms as they developed in your life, noting important events, with the thoughts and feelings you had at the time. Note now when fears connected with your phobia arise—what are you doing or thinking that triggers the fear?
- Be curious about what perpetuates your panic: What do you tell yourself when it arises? What secondary feelings and thoughts then arise? Did something occur to trigger your anxiety? Make a timeline of the symptoms as they developed in your life, noting important events, with the thoughts and feelings you had at the time.
- Learn relaxation tools and techniques:
 - What relaxes you? It can be as simple as breathing exercises, warm baths or milk, and listening to peaceful music, or as complicated as yoga classes, meditation practice, progressive relaxation exercises.
 - A simple exercise: Breathe, with the intention of slowing and deepening our breaths. Feet on the floor, sitting up comfortably, take a few normal breaths, slowly focusing in on your breath; begin to count slowly to four as you breathe in through your nose. Relax your muscles. Breathe deeply into your belly, letting it expand out as you breathe in. Then exhale even more slowly through your nose, counting to six or eight. Continue to breathe slowly & deeply, counting each breath for a few minutes, being sure to loosen the muscles in your torso, shoulders, neck, belly with each breath.
 - Limit caffeine, nicotine, substances & alcohol use: even small amounts used regularly can make anxiety worse.