

RELABELING SYMPTOMS OF PANIC

The worst has not befallen me—It’s really just anxiety.

Anyone who has experienced panic or anxiety knows that while an attack is happening, it seems to last forever. Although most episodes endure for less than three minutes, an attack can be prolonged for hours or days by imagining that you are dying, going crazy, or making a fool of yourself. However, the body’s natural calming mechanism will always cause the most intense symptoms of panic to pass.

Anxiety attacks are nothing more than the body’s natural reaction to a surge of adrenaline. This is the hormone that responds to danger, low blood sugar, and stimulants. It prepares the body for action by increasing blood flow and tensing muscles. When adrenaline effects are experienced without the presence of clear danger, they can be frightening and less easily dissipated. To be convinced of how normally your body is reacting, you need to fully understand the “adrenaline connection” between sensations and panic.

The Adrenaline Connection	
Directions: Check any symptoms you experience and study related coping strategies.	
Symptoms	To Cope
Increased blood flow:	
<p>— A pounding, racing heart results from a surge of adrenaline that causes stronger, more rapid contractions to increase blood flow. The heart compensates for quick, forceful beats by taking a pause, creating the sensation of thumping, or “missing beats.” Palpitations are a natural reaction to aerobic exercise, infection, exhaustion, caffeine, cigarettes, and troubling thoughts.</p> <p>— Hot flashes and sensations of “heating up” result from blood rushing to the center of the body due to increased heart action. To compensate, perspiration helps cool off the body. Coldness in hands and feet may result from blood rushing toward the center of the body.</p>	<p>Think: The heart muscle is very strong and cannot burst. A “nervous heart” is still in control and will always return to its normal rhythm.</p> <p>Act: Consult a physician to rule out any physical problems: high blood pressure, mitral valve prolapse, menopause, hyperthyroidism, low blood sugar, anemia, or a heart condition.</p> <p>Relabel palpitations as anxiety if physical problems have been ruled out.</p> <p>Think: “Overheating” is a good aerobic exercise. It is identical to what occurs during heavy exercise. Relabel changes in body temperature accompanying palpitations as a side effect of an adrenaline rush and increased heart activity.</p>
Chest muscles contract:	
<p>— Chest pain that feels like a pinprick or stitch is caused when chest wall muscles become tense. Sharp pain is felt when the lungs expand during inhalation. Deep breaths can be difficult until discomfort passes. A narrowing of arteries causes heart disease.</p> <p>— Trouble breathing can happen when tense chest muscles do not allow enough room for lungs to expand. To compensate, some people take large gulps of air or start breathing fast. Trouble breathing can also result from obesity, pregnancy, colds, asthma, and emphysema.</p>	<p>Act: Have your doctor rule out heart problems, particularly if you have dull pain or pressure in the center of the chest that radiates to the neck, jaw, or left arm.</p> <p>Relabel pain as “chest wall pain” due to stress once heart disease is ruled out.</p> <p>Think: Breathing problems due to anxiety are no different from having trouble catching your breath after heavy exercise. It is impossible to stop breathing—just try holding your breath.</p> <p>Relabel symptoms as the result of tense chest muscles if physical problems aren’t present.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Hyperventilation happens when too much oxygen collects in the lungs due to rapid breathing and washes out carbon dioxide. — Giddiness, Tingling, or Numbness can be caused by oxygen collecting in the lungs due to rapid breathing. Physical conditions of anemia and carpal tunnel syndrome can also cause light-headedness or tingling. 	<p>Act: Breath into a paper bag to inhale carbon dioxide if too much oxygen is causing hyperventilation.</p> <p>Act: See your doctor if symptoms occur at times other than during rapid breathing.</p> <p>Relabel giddiness and numbness that accompanies troubled breathing as the result of too much oxygen from rapid breathing.</p>
Limb muscles tense:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Shakiness is the body’s way of releasing muscle tension. It often happens after lifting heavy objects. Trembling can also be caused by hyperthyroidism and low blood sugar. — Feeling faint happens when blood flows away from the brain to “feed” tired tense muscles. 	<p>Think: Shaking can be a way to express joy, as the Shakers and other religious groups did.</p> <p>Act: Unlock knees and let arms hang loosely so they can tremble freely. This allows shaking to pass more quickly.</p> <p>Act: Slow down to let any faintness pass. Put your head between your knees to return blood to your brain if necessary.</p>
Throat muscles tense:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Difficulty swallowing can also feel like a “lump in the throat” or choking. 	<p>Think: Swallowing is automatic.</p> <p>Act: Try chewing a cracker without swallowing.</p>
Jaw clenches:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Dizziness, disorientation, and floating feelings happen when jaw tension puts pressure on the inner ear. The same symptoms occur when the inner ear is stressed on amusement park rides. Fluid retention from colds, allergies, and thyroid problems can also strain the inner ear. — Nausea, diarrhea, and blurred vision happen when pressure on the inner ear irritates nerves to the stomach and eyes. Discomfort from fluorescent lighting, cloudy days, loud noises, and freeway driving can stress nerve endings and also aggravate inner ear problems. 	<p>Act: Notice how far your jaw can drop with your mouth closed when you’re not upset. Clenching and letting go of your jaw can help during panic. Give symptoms time to pass. See your doctor for possible inner ear problems.</p> <p>Relabel symptoms as inner ear pressure.</p> <p>Act: Relaxing your jaw may help blurred vision or nausea pass more quickly. Without rushing, you can find a restroom. If you tell yourself it is okay to vomit, nausea often passes.</p> <p>Relabel symptoms that happen during anxiety as irritation of stomach and eye muscles.</p>

THE SECOND FEAR OF PANIC

Panic happens when concern over the above symptoms triggers further adrenaline release that causes a desire to flee. It is experienced in the mind rather than in the body. There is a sense of urgency, with thoughts such as, “I have to get to a place of safety” or, “I have to get outside and get some air.” Panic comes in a wave and must pass as adrenaline dissipates throughout the body. What you are feeling is annoying, unsettling, and possibly painful, but it is not harmful! People do not die or “go crazy” from panic. Relabel panic as the fear of fear that inevitably happens before you learn to manage your symptoms.

- Panic is the fear of not being in complete control of physical and mental faculties.
- Generalized anxiety is the fear of not meeting others’ expectations or handling responsibilities, such as paying bills or keeping a job.