



Flight, Fight or Freeze The Panic Attack & What it is

The first aspect to know is that anxiety and or a panic attack **will NOT hurt you, is NOT dangerous and is COMPLETELY harmless**. Anxiety is a sensation that happens in our body. In fact, we need anxiety as it keeps us safe. It feels as though something bad is happening, but it is actually our body protecting us from danger. The catch is...anxiety happens when there is no real danger, and our body has received a false alarm from a part of our brain called the amygdala. This feeling sometimes occurs out of the blue and when this happens, it can be scary and feel as if something is seriously wrong. After a panic attack occurs, we often avoid the place where the anxiety or panic occurred; incorrectly associating the place with the feeling and we then worry about having another one panic attack. Panic/anxiety feels uncomfortable but is not dangerous and will not hurt you. It will not cause fainting, throwing up or going crazy and doing something embarrassing. Anxiety/panic is a false alarm in the body doing exactly what it should if there really was something wrong. Our body keeps us safe and it can sometimes be overprotective. It is like a fire alarm going off when there is not fire. All the symptoms of anxiety can be explained so it is helpful to learn what the symptoms are and what is happening in our body. What is helpful to know is that if we do nothing during a panic attack, it will go away on its own. It will run its course and then dissipate. Most panic attacks are brief and peak within 10 minutes and then fade. We should not want to get rid of anxiety because we need it, however; we do want to learn what to do when it happens and when it shows up. Just knowing what is happening, can be very helpful in tolerating panic and anxiety. Learning to simply notice and accept this feeling and describe it as it's happening can take the fear out of having a panic attack and gain control and confidence that anxiety can be managed and worked through.

The Feeling:

What it Means:

Dizziness

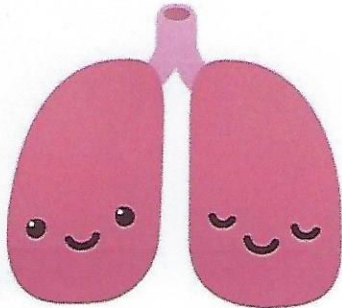


Dizziness happens when the part of the brain (amygdala) receives the false alarm and tickles the inner ear where our balance is controlled. This feeling will not cause you to faint. This feels uncomfortable AND is not dangerous.



Headache

The blood that usually stays in our brain travels to other parts of the body to race around to protect our heart and other organs. This can make our head hurt. Also, fluctuating chemicals can cause blood vessels to constrict and tighten. This feels uncomfortable AND is not dangerous.



Hyperventilation

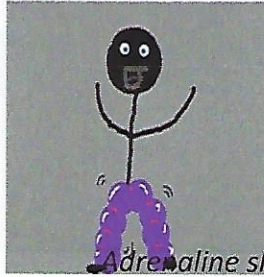
Breathing is being changed since our blood is moving to our heart to protect it. It can feel like we can't breathe but our body will NEVER let us stop breathing during an anxiety attack. It also may feel like pressure in our chest or that the throat is closing. This is due to increased blood surrounding your heart to protect your heart. Your air passages will not close and you will have all the air you need. The feels uncomfortable AND is not dangerous.



Racing Heart

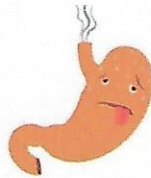
*Our heart is being surrounded by our blood to protect it. The heart feels tight and we feel our heart pounding rapidly. You will not die or faint. **THERE IS NO DANGER TO THIS FEELING.** This movement of the blood to our heart is actually helpful if we really were being chased by a bear and were in danger as this would help us not bleed as much if we were cut in any way if we were running. Again, this is our body protecting us. This feels uncomfortable AND is not dangerous.*

**Tense Muscles
Jelly Legs**



Adrenaline shoots thru our muscles causing tension. This actually helps us run faster if we really were in danger but since this is a false alarm, this feels uncomfortable AND is not dangerous.

Stomachache



The stomach is similar to our brain so when we feel anxious, our stomach feels it too. Actually, what is happening is that our digestive system shuts down when we are in this state causing the feeling of butterflies or feeling nausea. We don't need to worry about food or being hungry if we are in danger, so our body shuts the digestive system down to help us. Throwing up is extremely rare despite that it can feel like we need to throw up. The feels uncomfortable AND is not dangerous.

Feeling hot or temperature change



The changing temperature in the body actually prepares us to take action like running. This temperature change is also a reaction to the blood in our body moving to our heart. Again, uncomfortable AND not dangerous.

Watch for more tips coming soon:

As a means to continue helping the process of managing anxiety, watch for following articles on parenting the anxious child.

DK Counseling Services