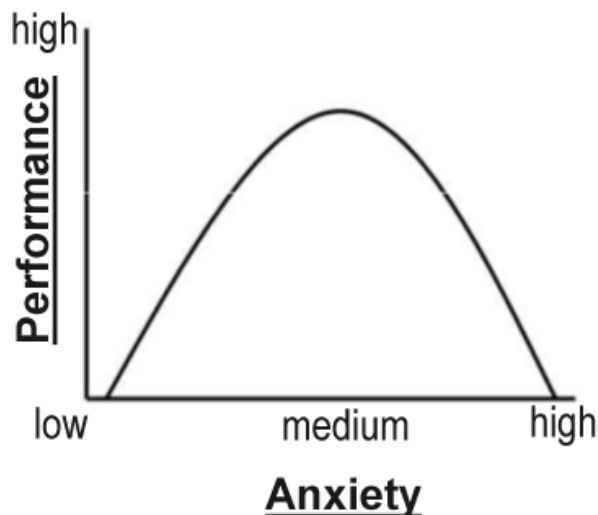




## Dealing with Fear: Coping Strategies

### What is fear?

Fear prepares our bodies to cope with something we are frightened of. When we are frightened, adrenaline is automatically released into our blood stream. This tells our bodies to react and to cope with the stress we feel so that we have energy to perform and think clearly. A moderate amount of anxiety is a normal reaction and can help improve performance. However, a high amount of anxiety or fear, can have a negative effect. Our bodies can react by feeling intensely fearful (heart pounding, difficulties breathing, sweating) and this can sometimes trigger a panic attack.



### What is a Panic Attack?

Panic attacks are sudden feelings of intense fear or anxiety. They can sometimes happen during very challenging times but it is important to remember they do pass. The key is to stay calm and breathe.

### What causes Panic Attacks?

They can be triggered by a major life event, but sometimes there is no obvious reason why they start. There are things you can do that will help. Panic Attacks develop as follows:

**Internal or external trigger**  
*(an event or a negative thought)*



**Slight increase in body symptoms**  
(*palpitations, sweating, shortness of breath*)



**Focus on symptoms**  
(*heart beating faster, difficulty breathing*)



**Catastrophic Interpretation**  
(*"I can't breathe"; "I am having a heart attack"*)

An event or negative thought causes an increase in adrenalin which is pumped around your body. Our bodies will respond to danger to protect ourselves it is called the "fight or flight" response. A panic attack happens when, although there is no threat or danger, your body is responding as if there is.



## What are the Signs of a Panic Attack?

The symptoms of a panic attack are listed below:

### Physical Signs (How the body reacts)

Dizziness	Blurred vision
Sound distortion	Nausea
Dry mouth, difficulty swallowing	Sweating or trembling
Headaches	Diarrhoea
Skin rashes or flare ups	Butterflies in stomach
Chest/stomach pains	Loss of appetite
Tingling sensation, pins and needles (particularly in hands)	

### Behavioural Signs (Things we do)

Avoiding places	Avoiding people and social situations
Constantly seeking reassurance	Excessive drinking/smoking/eating
Difficulty sleeping/nightmares	Increased irritability

### Cognitive Signs (The way we think)

Difficulty concentrating	Difficulty making decisions
Forgetfulness	Distorted or irrational thoughts
Excessive worrying	Thinking negatively

Panic attacks can last from a few seconds to 10 minutes. If you experience one you may feel that you are going mad, going deaf, going blind, can't breathe or having a heart attack. You may be worried that others will notice that you are anxious or that you might lose control and faint or start running or screaming. This might make you feel more panicked.

**REMEMBER:  
A PANIC ATTACK CANNOT HARM YOU.  
IT IS NOT LIFE THREATENING AND IT WILL PASS.  
THE KEY IS TO STAY CALM AND BREATHE.**

## How to Deal with Panic Attacks?

Things you can do

- Look at general stress and anxiety coping strategies in the documents entitled 'Dealing with Stress' and 'Dealing with Anxiety: Coping Strategies'.
- Practice relaxation techniques. Identify which ones work well for you.
- Learn about the causes of panic attacks.
- Learn about the effects of panic attacks.



- Try to figure out what triggers a panic attack in you.
- Try to identify and challenge your negative thoughts by using the 'Thoughts Log' (see 'Dealing with Anxiety: Coping Strategies')

#### During a Panic Attack

- Don't try to escape the situation.
- Try using a paper bag that you can breathe into - this will help you to regulate your breathing
- Reassure yourself what is happening; name it "I am having a panic attack".
- Repeat calming and supportive statements – "This will pass; It's only anxiety; I am not going to faint, stop breathing, choke" etc.
- Practice Thought Stopping – take a deep breath and say **STOP** to your thoughts, repeat several times.
- Practice deep breathing or muscle relaxation. Breathe in slowly, count to three and breathe out slowly. Do this until you start to calm down.
- Do something that requires focused attention like a simple repetitive activity (e.g. counting backwards).
- Distract yourself by moving around or doing something physical e.g. walking, stretching.
- Imagine a calming place – visualisation.

Remember this takes practice. Stick with it. Take the time to practice these techniques when you are not feeling panicked or anxious.

You are not alone. Talking through some of the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing, with someone you trust, will ease your stress and anxiety – it always helps to "get things off your chest".

If your panic attacks continue, talk to an adult and/or visit your GP for additional ways to manage them. Ask your GP about Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).